

LAST WORDS

philosophical papers

D. R. Khashaba

2017

To

Jo Smith

my most enthusiastic reader,

who, sadly, it seems,

is no longer with us

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Let Us Philosophize (1998, 2008)

Plato: An Interpretation (2005)

Socrates' Prison Journal (2006)

Hypatia's Lover (2006)

The Sphinx and the Phoenix (2009)

Plato's Memoirs (2010)

Quest of Reality (2013)

Metaphysical Reality (2014)

Plato's Universe of Discourse (2015)

Creative Eternity: A Metaphysical Myth
(2016)

Stephen Hawking's Bad Metaphysics -
Eternity and Freedom – Philosophy of
Creative Eternity (comprising Creative
Eternity and Eternity and Freedom)

Preface

This is my goodbye to philosophy — not to philosophizing: a person who does not philosophize is sub-human. I began to philosophize in my early teens but such was my *karma* that my first book was not to appear till I had crossed the traditional three-score-and-ten mark. Over two decades since then I have self-published ten books. Foolishly I expected my writings would constitute a turning-point in the history of philosophy. I aver that that expectation, foolish as it was, was yet not unwarranted; it was foolish only in that it ignored the stranglehold professional philosophy has on philosophical

thinking. Even the handful of readers who have admired my writings have missed what I consider most original and most important in my philosophy.

The papers collected here were posted to my blog between August 2016 and July 2017. With my ninetieth birthday less than a month ahead I cannot have much more time yet to live and even if I am given a few more years I would rather make better use of them than regurgitating what has already been stated and overstated. So here are my *Last Words* and my Goodbye.

D. R. Khashaba

August 6, 2017

WAS PLATO'S *PHAEDO* A YOUTHFUL DIALOGUE?

I have frequently, both in my latest book – *Creative Eternity* – and previously, ascribed Plato's over-emphasis in the *Phaedo* on the constancy, immutability, and 'separateness' of the Forms to youthful enthusiasm. Richard Schain reminds me that scholars classify the *Phaedo* as a middle-term dialogue. I have no intention to contest the placing of the dialogue in the middle term (many would say 'early middle') but find no reason for changing my position. Yet clearly that calls for explanation and justification.

The chronology of Plato's dialogues is a very contorted question and although the dating of the *Phaedo* is not crucial to my position, let us nevertheless put it to rest with a few remarks. Plato's date of birth is traditionally given as 428/7 BC but Debra Nails thinks it should be corrected to 424/3 ("The Life of Plato of Athens", *A Companion to Plato*, ed. Hugh H. Benson. Blackwell, 2006). Plato would have been about 24 at the time of Socrates' death. According to Nails, Plato turned 30 in 394 and it was about that time that Plato, Theaetetus, Archytas of Tarentum, Leodamas of Thasos, and perhaps Neoclides "began congregating ... in the grove of the hero Hecademus ... to pursue their studies". That gives us an early date for the 'gestation' of the Academy although the formal 'founding' was to take place a decade later when Plato was about 40. When were the 'early' and the 'middle'

dialogues written? Perhaps we should rather speak of ‘very early’, ‘early’ and ‘late’ dialogues. On this count all the dialogues preceding the *Republic* would have been written by Plato in his thirties. Perhaps for a time he was too busy with the Academy and with his Sicilian misadventures to do much writing. Be that as it may. I assert that I do not base my position on such considerations and while the word ‘youthful’ may have been inapt, I see no reason to modify my reading of Plato’s position regarding the Forms. I will now give a summary of that reading.

It is incontestable that Socrates was primarily concerned with moral questions and concentrated on the examination of the moral notions — *dikaiosunê*, *sôphrosunê*, *andreia*, etc. That he distinguished these as intelligible *eidê* or *ideai* and contrasted them to perceptible impressions is probable. In any case I imagine that

Plato in re-enacting the Socratic investigations in the early dialogues saw two things: (1) These notions have their birth in the mind and their whole meaning in the mind and that meaning can only be beheld in the self-evidence of the 'ideas' in the mind. (2) It is these intelligible ideas that give meaning to perceptible things. Without these intelligible 'forms' nothing whatever has any meaning for us.

As a consequence of (2) Plato saw that the intelligible forms cannot be confined to the moral ideas and ideals. In the first part of the *Parmenides* the aged sage of Elea attributes Socrates' reluctance to admit forms of dirt and hair to Socrates' immaturity.

Pursuing (1) Plato developed the view of the philosophical life depicted in the *Phaedo*, unfolded in the *Symposium*, poetically portrayed in the *Phaedrus*. The Forms were clothed in

holiness and sanctity. The Forms were divine and imbued us with divinity. (I do not gravely sin when I call that youthful exuberance even if displayed by an old man.) But in that same first part of the *Parmenides* Plato shows that all theoretical attempts to relate the Forms to the objective things on the understanding that these are two separate entities must fail. That is the *chôrismos* that Aristotle castigates and that scholars continue to lampoon as Plato's "Theory of Forms".

In the *Sophist* Plato criticizes the 'Friends of the Forms', maintaining that what is real cannot be rigidly fixed but must have life and intelligence. (See *Plato: An Interpretation*, Chapter Ten, # IV.)

This is the philosophy I find for myself in Plato. My approach to Plato as to all philosophy is not scholarly. I never claimed to discover what Plato thought

or meant; I only offer what vision Plato or any other philosopher inspires in me. The philosophy I offer is confessedly my philosophy and must be judged on its own merits.

Cairo, August 13, 2016.

HOW CAN A BELIEF BE FALSE?

The second chapter in Dr. Geoffrey Klempner's doctoral thesis (*The Metaphysics of Meaning*, 1982, Kindle Edition 2016) is titled: "How can a belief be false?" That of course is the question thrashed in Plato's *Theaetetus* and the short answer is that a belief is never false, or better put, the question of truth or falsehood is not relevant to belief. [This paper does not discuss or comment on Klempner's text. I wrote the following on glancing the title, an inveterate habit of mine.]

The little Princess in Hans Christian Andersen's tale believed the

moon was the size of her thumb and was made of silver. Her belief was pragmatically justified: the Princess got the moon she wanted which she could not have got on the learned Counsellor's notion of the moon.

A Catholic or Orthodox Christian believes he receives the body and blood of Christ in Holy Communion and their belief gives them comfort and satisfaction.

A belief is a state of feeling (an emotive condition) – even such a paltry belief as my believing that my laptop battery needs changing in so far as it is a belief does not admit truth or falsehood. Only when turned into a judgment is it liable to being true or false. Thus in the *Theaetetus* we find that Protagoras's 'Man the Measure' is admissible on the plane of perception (or rather sensation) but not on the plane of judgment.

Andersen's Princess had no occasion to turn her belief into a judgment. The Catholic or Orthodox Christian has the judgment inextricably mixed with the belief and that is why we non-believers can tell them their belief is false, but of course neither they nor we can prove or disprove either position because in this case there is no physical object out there as in the case of the moon that can be checked to validate or falsify the judgment. In the case of my laptop battery my belief is effectively a judgment; even so, to say that my 'belief' is true or false would be a strictly improper way of speaking; it is the implied judgment that is either true or false.

What about metaphysical pronouncements — Leibniz' Monadology or Spinoza's *deus sive natura*? As I see it, a metaphysical statement is neither a belief nor a judgment. It is a vision. Leibniz,

Berkeley, or Schopenhauer says “This way I find reality intelligible.” They are poets. They give us imaginative intrinsically coherent visions, intelligible worlds. Shakespeare gives us an intelligible world in *The Tempest*. The *Tempest* world is real inasmuch as it is meaningful, this being the metaphysical criterion of reality. But Shakespeare would be insane if he said that the *Tempest* reports actuality. Sadly, our great creative metaphysicians – all but Plato – have fallen into this insanity: they assumed their imaginative pronouncements were factual judgments. Only Plato confessed he was giving us myths, meaningful myths that give us intelligible worlds to live in, real worlds in the only metaphysically significant sense of the word real, as opposed to the illusory ‘reality’ of the objective world.

The question “How can a belief be false?” only seems perplexing because

of the ambiguity of the term ‘belief’.
When re-formulated as “How can a
judgment be false?” we have the
question examined at length in the
Theaetetus. I do not intend to go further
into that at this point.

Cairo, August 15, 2016.

MIND IS NOT AN EPIPHENOMENON

Scientists found no evidence of the existence of such a thing as the mind. Naturally, since the mind is not of such a nature as to be examined or detected by any physical means. Consequently scientists denied there is such a thing as the mind.

But people speak of having a mind: to explain this some scientists (and philosophers) speak of an ego illusion. Others, a bit more generous, speak of an epiphenomenon. Others yet speak of a phosphorescence of the brain.

What is an epiphenomenon? It is an accompaniment of a physical process which in itself is nothing. Perhaps we can call a mirage an epiphenomenon. But what we see in a mirage is actual light, but it is misinterpreted. Perhaps we can call a rainbow an epiphenomenon. Yet a rainbow is something we actually see, but it is not something that you can collect and carry to a laboratory to examine, yet you can reproduce it in a laboratory. So the mind epiphenomenon is not as good as a mirage or a rainbow: these we may be told are not epiphenomena but natural phenomena.

Be that as it may. Admittedly scientists have not and will not ever find evidence for the existence of a mind. To scientists (and science-oriented philosophers) the mind is not an existent and in my own terminology the mind does NOT exist.

So what is the quarrel?

To the Empiricists' and the Analysts' denial of the mind I have two answers on two different planes.

On the practical level I say that it is of the mind that we have all that is of value in human life. Love and honour and justice are things of the mind.

Suppose a certain person has a miserable life but at night when he goes to sleep he regularly has blissful dreams. I say that person would be justified if he insisted that his night life is his real life and it is for that life that he tolerates the misery of his day life.

Kant laboured to catch what he called the transcendental unity of apperception. He laboured in vain, because it is not in the nature of the transcendental unity of apperception (the 'I', subjectivity, consciousness) to be objectified in any observation, image, or conceptual formulation.

Yet Kant would not give up. Why?
Because he knew that that uncatchable
thing is what we truly are.

All of that comes within the answer
on the practical or moral level. It
concedes to the scientist that the mind
has no objective existence. On this
plane the mind is a ‘no-thing’ that is yet
important for the idealist and the
moralist.

On the metaphysical level I say: All
right, you say that physical reality is all
the reality there is. In my terminology I
have a different usage but let us not
haggle about words. Let the natural
world, the mountains, the galaxies be
the sum of ‘reality’. But in that reality
there is nothing fixed, nothing constant,
and I add, nothing grounded. Poets and
sages long ago knew that “this too too
solid flesh (will) melt”. Come to
scientists. You search for the ultimate
origin, the ultimate ground of things and

you end up with the ‘singularity’ of the Big Bang which, begging your pardon, I translate as the absurdity of the Big Bang. (See “Stephen Hawking’s Bad Metaphysics”.) Your reality, the galaxies and the whole physical universe are no more than a fleeting shadow. You deal with hard things, hard facts, so long as you deal with determinate finite things; when you seek the ultimate ground of things you gape into a bottomless abyss.

I say, what is really real, what is ultimately real, is not a thing but the activity that brings about the things, and I see that activity, that creativity, as intelligent, as pure creative intelligence. Ultimate Reality is not a thing, not an existing God, not a Creator, but sheer creativity. That ultimate non-existent Reality Eckhart called Nothingness; that ultimate non-existent Reality I call Creative Eternity.

Call that a fancy, call it a myth, yet
it is a myth that makes the mystery of
the world intelligible to my mind.

August 20, 2016.

WHAT IDEALISM IS NOT

In all my writings I have been trying to advance an understanding of metaphysical idealism. It may be helpful to say something about what idealism is not. Philosophical idealism (Plato's, Berkeley's, Kant's (?), Hegel's, Bradley's) does not say that the objects we see and handle are an illusion. It is rather physicists who tell us that the red rose is not really red. And in a way they are right. In itself the rose is not red. The colour red that we see is a product of the three-cornered interplay of the light, the rose, and the eye. To insist that the rose is not really red is not idealism but what Whitehead

called the Fallacy of Misplaced Concreteness.

Idealism does not say that there is nothing in the world but my thoughts, that I am at the centre of things and that all things around me are nothing but my thoughts. This is not idealism but solipsism and I am not now discussing solipsism. Berkeley definitely did not hold that the objects in the world are my thoughts. Berkeley said two things (1) Berkeley, following Locke, said that all we know of the things in the world are the perceptions we receive through our senses: that when I say there is a mountain out there I mean I perceive a mountain out there or that it is possible for a percipient to perceive a mountain out there. (2) Precisely because Berkeley held that the mountain I perceive has actual being out there and because he held that we know of no substance over and above or beyond the perceptions and because perceptions

must be in a mind — precisely because he had no scepticism about the actuality of the mountain that he thought the perceptions that constitute the world must be in the mind of God. Think what you may of Berkeley's vision but don't say that the things around us were for Berkeley an illusion.

Plato never put the actuality of actual things in doubt. Plato despised the pleasures, the pains, the glories that the world oppresses us with. The poorest psychologist will tell you that a person you despise is much more present to you than all those you love.

Kant decidedly did not deny the actuality of things outside us. Kant said the things outside us in themselves are meaningless. That bright disk above my head at night is just that; it is Astronomy that tells me it is a massive body reflecting the rays of the sun. Before Astronomy it was a god or

goddess. In either case what I know of it is what I *know* of it and what I know of it is what my mind (Understanding in Kant's terminology) makes of it. For Kant, no more than for the savage worshipping the moon, no more than for Newton puzzling about its rotation, was the actuality of the bright disk up there an illusion or only an idea in my mind.

We all occasionally have illusions or visual deceptions. We recognize them as such and clearly distinguish them from genuine perceptions. The persistence of illusion defines lunacy. The Indian hermit in his forest refuge, leaving the world behind him as deceptive *maya*, distinguishes clearly between the deceptiveness of the things he renounces and the illusoriness of the red spot he sees if he chances to fix his eye for a while on the sun.

But perhaps it's no use trying to explain this. Plato was right. The Gods

and the Giants (*Sophist*, 245e-246e) will never come to an understanding. The difference between them is temperamental, else Aristotle would not have so grossly misunderstood Plato.

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Empiricists think that the quintessence of knowledge is objectivity. They are right. But that is one kind of knowledge, scientific knowledge, for the core principle of science is objectivity. But philosophical understanding is a totally different thing. Philosophical understanding is first and last subjective. Kierkegaard said, Truth is subjectivity. Better said, Understanding is subjectivity. You don't understand a concerto by having adequate knowledge about the instruments, about the physical laws of sound, about the physiology of hearing. You can know all that and yet remain unreceptive to what the composer wanted to convey.

You understand a concerto by enjoying a subjective experience. That is why I insist that using the words ‘knowledge’ and ‘understanding’ as equivalents is confusing.

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Where my philosophy improves on Plato is in explaining that the reality of the ideas is secondary. What is ultimately real is the mind that creates the ideas; but this statement is also mixed with falsehood; for it is not the mind as a thing (substance or even simply entity) but the sheer pure creativity that is ultimately real. The crux of my philosophy is the seeming paradox: What is real does not exist but gives birth to all existents. What is real is the *hupodochê* of Plato’s *Timaeus*, the womb of all being and all becoming, but it is not an existent womb: its reality is its procreateness, its eternal *tokos en kalôi*. What exists is essentially

evanescent; it cannot be real or the
source of reality. This is the gist of my
Creative Eternity.

August 16, 2016.

ABDICATION

I give up!

I say and repeat *ad nauseam* that philosophy, at any rate what I proudly call my philosophy, has nothing to do with truth, nothing to do with facts, and yet people keep pointing out to me that what I say is not supported by science.

I hereby solemnly declare that I am NOT a philosopher.

I cannot call myself a poet because I do not write verse.

I cannot write fiction because I am a very poor observer and have next to no memory for images and sensuous

details — necessary material for
fashioning fiction.

I am a fablemonger.

I am a poor Aesop, a second rate
Hans Christian Anderson, a fake half of
one of the Brothers Grimm.

I fabricate fables the moral of
which is for everyone to devise for
oneself.

So please stop telling me that what
I write is at variance with the testimony
of respectable science.

I compose meaningful myths
whose meaning is not subject to the
common criteria of meaning.

I compose myths that aspire to the
meaningfulness of a lyric.

Please don't apply to my myths the
tests of truth and fact.

With Socrates I have long ago
ceded all truth and all fact as a
prerogative of science.

I have been saying this in all my
writings. If you find what I have said in
the above lines nonsensical, don't read
anything of mine: you will be merely
wasting your time.

August 21, 2016.

DARWIN ONTHOUGHT

Noam Chomsky in his preface to the third edition of *Language and Mind* refers to Darwin asking “rhetorically why ‘thought, being a secretion of the brain,’ should be considered ‘more wonderful than gravity, a property of matter’.” This perfectly illustrates the confounding of scientific questions with philosophical questions — an error that Socrates uncovered twenty-six centuries ago and that I have been harping on in all my writings, but that the modern mind, moulded by the objective scientific outlook, fails to grasp. (I am just starting to read Chomsky’s book and am not certain of his stance; hence

in what follows I will confine myself to discussing Darwin's view.)

There are three words in Darwin's statement that call for Socratic scrutinization. It seems that scientists in all fields of scientific inquiry are so engrossed in things that they pay little attention to words. The three words I refer to are: secretion, gravity, and property.

In what sense is thought a "secretion" of the brain? This is clearly a metaphor and not an apt metaphor at that.

As for "gravity", Newton himself confessed that he did not know what it was; it remained a complete mystery to him.

What does it mean to say that "gravity" is a "property" of matter? Does it mean that there is a thing called "gravity" hidden in matter? All that empirical observation justifies us in saying is that for some reason that we do not know

bodies move relatively to each other in a certain way. Newton named that unknown and unknowable cause “gravity”. Einstein thought that “cause” was a certain curvature in space — and who on earth knows what “space” is?

And supposing we admit that thought is a “secretion” of the brain, does that make it less wonderful? We know that plants grow and produce flowers and fruits and we can describe in great detail the processes involved, but if you don’t sense the wonder of that I can only pity your experiential poverty.

Please note that I am not discussing the science in all that statement. Scientists are doing excellent work observing phenomena and formulating laws that enable us to make predictions and to influence the course of natural processes. But don’t tell me that does away with the mystery of thought.

In philosophy we deal with meanings, with values. These are subjective things; they are part of the inwardness of our inward life. They always have an outward accompaniment. You study the outward accompaniment from outside. You cannot study the subjective objectively; that is a contradiction in terms; it is more nonsensical than squaring the circle because you can approximate to the square of the circle since these belong to the one world of space, but the subjective and the objective are two different worlds: there is nothing common between them.

Philosophers, genuine philosophers, equally with poets and artists, are dreamers enriching our inner life; leave them their world and they will, if they listen to me, leave you your world.

I am not arguing, I am tired of explaining again and again and again that how x comes about is the business

of science, what x means is the business of philosophy and we cannot proceed from either of these to the other. I am not arguing and I am a fool for letting myself be dragged once more into this.

August 24, 2016.

MY KIND OF PHILOSOPHY

For nigh two decades I have been advancing a certain conception of the nature of philosophical thinking. Two factors have worked against my efforts, the one historical and the other we may call semantic.

Let me take the semantic factor first though it is closely connected with the historical factor. The word ‘philosophy’ has had a long rich history and has meant different things at different times and to different people. At one time philosophy was crowned queen of the sciences. I would be crazy if I meant to wipe off all that and

confine the usage to what I sometimes refer to as ‘philosophy proper’. Perhaps I could call my special kind of philosophy Platonism, but then a chorus of scholars will roar at me: That is not the Platonism we study and teach.

Now for the historical factor. Whereas in the Orient, in China or India, sages pronounced their insights into reality and into value in metaphor and parable and paradox and no one fancied that their wisdom, which was appreciated and revered, had anything to do with the natural world, in the Occident, philosophical thinking arose in Greece in close proximity with natural speculation and investigation.

First a word about how Greek philosophy differed from the wisdom of the Orient. The characteristic feature of Greek philosophy is rationality (not ‘rationalism’, I have elsewhere explained the distinction I make

between the two). The Greeks demanded intellectual satisfaction. They wanted their views to be intrinsically coherent. This is in essence an aesthetic craving. It is not essentially related to the desire for truth. Plato was satisfied with a 'likely tale'. On this more hereafter.

In Greece then philosophy arose in close proximity with science and the line between the two was sometimes blurred. Thales, Anaximander, Anaximenes were cosmogonists. They wanted to give a likely account of the development of the universe. They were fundamentally engaged in the same search carried on by today's astrophysicists. But Xenophanes was not interested in that. He was concerned with what goes on in the minds of human beings. Nor was Heraclitus primarily concerned with the actualities of the actual world. His mind searched the reality beyond the evanescence of

the natural world. He found reality in the *Logos* and in the unfathomable *Psuchê*.

Then came Socrates. In the ‘autobiographical’ passage in the *Phaedo* Socrates says that in his youth he was interested in the investigation of nature. An intelligent young man in mid-fifth-century Athens could not have failed to be attracted by the flood of investigations *peri phuseôs* current at the time. But that was not where his heart really was. He was concerned with virtue, justice, reasonableness; he was concerned with what benefits our inner reality and what harms our inner reality. He tells of his experience with Anaxagoras’s book and what he says in that respect is most revealing.

Socrates heard someone reading from Anaxagoras’s book and it seemed that Anaxagoras maintained that the mind was the prime cause of all things.

Socrates therefore eagerly sought to obtain and read the book but he was deeply disappointed. Anaxogoras's system was just another cosmogony. Here Socrates reached a revolutionary conclusion that students of philosophy – most of all erudite scholars – have ignored and continue to ignore.

I have explained that crucial conclusion of Socrates tens of times. Let me try to put it in a new way. The human mind raises two different kinds of questions: (1) Questions about natural things, what they are, how they come about, how it is possible to handle and manipulate them. (2) Questions about the meaning and the value of such notions as good and bad, of justice, of amity, of life, of joy, of beauty. For answers to the first class of questions we have to go out to the things where the things are. For answers to the second class of questions we have to probe our own minds. Socrates was

convinced that these two kinds of approach have nothing, nothing, nothing in common. The first kind is the business of science; the second is the business of philosophy in a special restricted sense of the term.

Philosophy has no answers to the questions proper to science and science has no answers to questions proper to philosophy. Philosophy cannot even approach the questions proper to science and science cannot even approach the questions proper to science. The moderns – Empiricists, Analysts, the advocates of scientism – have been rubbing in the first leg of this dual statement but they refuse even to make an effort to understand the second part. What cannot be validated by scientific methods is for them nonsense and that's that.

Came Plato. Early in his career Plato produced a number of dramatic

pieces mimicking the Socratic examination of ideas. Scholars have differed in their reading of those works. In my idiotic reading I find in those dialogues a dual lesson. (1) The meaning of a notion such as justice cannot be determined in terms extraneous to the notion. The meaning can only be found in the self-evidence of the idea in the mind. (2) Since as human beings our life and behavior are governed by our beliefs, convictions, evaluations, it is necessary that we constantly subject our mind to examination to remove obscurities, disentangle entanglements of ideas, unearth false beliefs and prejudices implanted in us, etc.

But Plato was also irked by an original question: What is really real? What is ultimately real? He was convinced that the answer to that question cannot be found in the world outside us. He was convinced that the

ideas in our mind and our mind itself are what is really real. He identified what is really real, what is ultimately real, with our mind which is our own inner reality. We are immediately aware of that reality; in our exercise of intelligence we are in intimate communion with reality; but that reality is strictly ineffable since determinate thought and determinate language cannot constrain that reality. Our awareness of reality can only be intimated in myth and parable.

That Socratic-Platonic view of philosophy has been commonly ignored. Apart from Plotinus, only mystics and poets grasped it — until an idiotic, unlearned *philosophos* named Khashaba struggled to revive it around the turn of the twenty-first century.

August 25, 2016.

SHELLEY ANSWERS PLATO

Shelley was a great Plato lover; he was also a born poet for whom poetry was a religion. Plato too was a born poet but had a love-hate attitude to poetry issuing from two different sources, the one moral and the other a theoretical fancy. Whatever may have been Shelley's proximate incentive in writing his famous essay "A Defence of Poetry", he could not have helped having Plato and Plato's inimical stance towards poetry at the back of his mind throughout. Early in the essay Shelley hails Plato as "essentially a poet — the truth and splendour of his imagery, and the melody of his language, are the

most intense that it is possible to conceive.” In effect, Shelley’s “Defence of Poetry” is an answer to Plato. As Plato found it necessary in all reverence to answer ‘Father Parmenides’ (*Sophist*), so Shelley finds it necessary to answer the divine Plato. Yet we do not go wrong if we say that the whole essay is of Platonic inspiration.

Let me first explain what I mean in speaking of the two sources of Plato’s love-hate attitude to poetry — or rather of the hate element; the love requires neither proof nor explanation. In the first place Plato was enraged by the immoral and irrational stories about the gods propagated by the poets, chiefly by Hesiod and Homer. Books II-III of the *Republic* provide sufficient evidence of this. Then I suppose Plato, to mollify his bad conscience about his adverse stance towards poets and poetry, concocted the theory of imitation at the third remove of *Republic* X, belying his

own insightful view of poetry as inspiration (*Apology* 22c, *Symposium*, *Phaerus*, *Ion*). Let us now turn to Shelley's Defence.

Shelley opens his essay with a seminal distinction between reason and imagination. Reason, according to Shelley, may be considered as "mind contemplating the relation borne by one thought to another". Imagination on the other hand may be considered as "mind acting upon those thoughts so as to colour them with its own light, and composing from them, as from elements, other thoughts, each containing within itself the principle of its own integrity." The one mode (imagination) is synthetic, the other (reason) is analytic; "its action regards the relations of things, simply as relations, considering thoughts, not in their integral unity, but as the algebraical representations which conduct to certain general results."

Shelley continues: “Reason is the enumeration of quantities already known; imagination is the perception of the value of those quantities, both separately and as a whole.” (‘Value’ here = intrinsic nature, essence.)

I know of no better succinct statement of the Socratic-Platonic conception of knowledge and of the radical difference between science and philosophy than that condensed by Shelley in this prophetic opening paragraph. I believe that in these few lines we have the whole answer to Plato’s deprecation of poetry and art as imitation. (The charge of immorality is answered by Shelley further on in the essay.) I will first give my own expanded interpretation of this pregnant passage before going further. In fact the essence of what I refer to as Shelley’s answer to Plato is contained in the rich first two paragraphs of the essay and I will mainly concentrate on these.

Reason or reasoning, considers the external relations of ideas externally; this is the *dianoia* which occupies the lower division of the upper section of Plato's Divided Line (*Republic* 509d-511e), yielding not true *epistêmê* (understanding) , but *doxa* (opinion, much as this sounds odd to our modern Positivist ears). It is the investigation of things *en tois ergois* (in the outer world) which Socrates in the *Phaedo* (95e ff.) forgoes for the philosophical investigation *en tois logois* (in the mind). Reasoning, scientific thinking, Kant's pure reason, is, as Shelley rightly sees, concerned with quantities and the relations of quantities. These are objective, empirically given, never apprehending thoughts "in their integral unity, but as the algebraical representations which conduct to certain general results", which 'general results' I call scientific transitional approximations. It is only in

‘imagination’ – in which, with Shelley, I include philosophizing – that the mind, shedding upon thoughts its own light, composes from them other thoughts “each containing within itself the principle of its own integrity”. As I have repeatedly stated in my writings, the *aporia* (perplexity) to which the Socratic elenchus invariably leads, is meant to reveal that the inner reality of the thought can only be beheld in the self-evidence of the idea (its “integral unity”) in the mind. Moreover in imagination the mind composes “other thoughts, each containing within itself the principle of its own integrity”. This is a clear affirmation of the creativity of the mind. This is what Plato usually calls *phronêsis*, though in the Divided Line (with Plato’s notorious disregard for terminological uniformity) he designates *noêsis* or simply *nous*. The creativity of the mind is definitely affirmed in the *Republic* (490a-b on

which I repeatedly commented in my writings) and in Diotima's speech in the *Symposium*. Shelley penetratingly sees that the creative faculty "is the basis of all knowledge".

The fertile distinction of the opening paragraph is followed by a most profound development of the notion of the creativity of imagination, which I will try to do justice to. The notions of cause and effect lose their artificial abstractedness and separation (as in the common theoretical usage) and are revealed to be, on the plane of creativity, inseparable aspects of an integral act (Bergson's notion of duration; Whitehead's notion of 'event'). We never in life (except in the theoretical abstraction debunked by Hume) meet a cause without the accompaniment of its inbred fulfilment. In living nature an event is not caused but unfolds like a sprout from the seed. The fertilized ovum does not cause the

baby; it unfolds into the baby. It is only in the carcass dissected by empirical science that the seed and the sprout are seen as cause and effect. Shelley elucidates this in a manner which, to do it justice, we can only designate as poetical and profoundly philosophical at once. Shelley has a deep insight into the wholeness of living, creative process not approached by professional philosophers until Bergson and Whitehead and still unglimped by the common run of academic scholars.

We can now follow Shelley's prophetic elucidation in his own words and examples which I will give with the minimum of interpretive interference.

Shelley first defines poetry, in a general sense, to be "the expression of the imagination". He continues: "Man is an instrument over which a series of external and internal impressions are driven, like the alternations of an ever-

changing wind over an Aeolian lyre,
which move it by their motion to ever-
changing melody. But there is a
principle within the human being ...
which acts otherwise than in the lyre,
and produces not melody alone but
harmony”. The creativity of poetry and
art is a wholly internal, completely
unified modulation outflowing in
spontaneous expression. This is a view
which consciously or unconsciously
does away with the representation of
poetry and art as imitation. At this point
we move into deeper waters where the
distinction of cause and effect vanishes
when we see poetic creation
exemplifying the creativity of all
reality. From the long second paragraph
I pick up the following stray sentences,
with little comment, to give a peep into
the metaphysical insight with which this
prophetic passage is replete.

“A child at play by itself, will express
its delight by its voice and motions ...”

“The savage ... expresses the emotions produced in him by surrounding objects” and in his “plastic or pictorial imitation” he is not merely imitating but expressing “his apprehension of them”. “... language, gesture, and the imitative arts, become at once the representation and the medium, the pencil and the picture, the chisel and the statue, the chord and the harmony.” “The social sympathies ... begin to develop themselves from the moment that two human beings coexist; the future is contained within the present, as the plant within the seed ...” This is the principle of the integral unity, the living, throbbing wholeness of all that is real, and it is no wonder that a poet anticipates professional philosophers in giving explicit expression to it. Past and future are empty abstractions. Unless the present be heavy with the future there would be no future; indeed there would be no extant world.

Further on we read: “A poet participates in the eternal, the infinite, and the one” — a clear echo of Plato. Hence a poet gives expression to the one reality that transcends all time, place, and multiplicity. Hence Shelley asserts that “Shakespeare, Dante, and Milton ... are philosophers of the very loftiest power”.

Plato unfortunately did not have a term for ‘imagination’: had he thought of poetry as creative imagination he would have seen the inaptness of his doctrine of *mimêsis* (imitation) and he would have seen that his own conception of philosophy places it firmly in the same class as poetry and art.

“The great secret of morals” Shelley writes, “is love; or a going out of our own nature, and an identification of ourselves with the beautiful which exists in thought, action, or person, not our own,” This only apparently contradicts Socrates’ identification of

knowledge and virtue. The ‘knowledge’ preached by Socrates is self-knowledge — knowledge of a form, a model, of perfection elected by one as one’s inner reality, as that within one that is enhanced by doing what is right and damaged by doing what is wrong. That is why when in the Socratic examination the conclusion is reached that virtue is knowledge and then it is further asked “What knowledge? Knowledge of what?” the only answer is: knowledge of that very excellence we were seeking to define. — I find this fully in harmony with Shelley’s “A man, to be greatly good, must imagine intensely and comprehensively; he must put himself in the place of another and of many others; the pains and pleasures of his species must become his own.”

Shelley sums up the gist of his essay in a few words: “The great instrument of moral good is the imagination; and poetry administers to the effect by

working on the cause.” This is not distant from what Plato himself says of the role of music in early education. (To anyone who might object that I find identities and similarities where there are none, I reply that a philosopher sees similarities and analogies where others see differences.)

I pass over Shelley’s ample and profound treatment of the question of morality and immorality in poetry and art, though this can be seen as a direct answer to Plato. I also pass over much else that is of the greatest significance and beauty, such as Shelley’s long brilliant “critical history of poetry and its influence on society” as I do not wish to extend this note much further.

September 13, 2016.

MEDITATIONS

Can the butterfly be
less beautiful
within than without?

The highest virtue is to be.
But how rarely we ever are!
The highest good is to be one.
How rarely, fleetingly are we ever one!
All folly, all misery, all pain,
is denial of being,
negation of our integrity.

This is Spinoza in a nutshell.

I found God homeless;

I housed him in my inner sanctuary.

September 29, 2916

THE ABSURDITY OF TIME TRAVEL

James Gleick has written a sane critique of the notion of time travel. Some time ago I dared to take the bull by the horn by critiquing the notion in Stephen Hawking's *Brief History of Time*. (See "Stephen Hawking's Bad Metaphysics".) I was delighted to find Gleick stating at the outset of his article: "I doubt that any phenomenon, real or imagined, has inspired more perplexing, convoluted, and ultimately futile philosophical analysis than time travel has."

Gleick writes: “For Einstein’s 70th birthday, in 1949, his friend (Kurt Gödel) presented him with a surprising calculation: that his field equations of general relativity allow for the possibility of ‘universes’ in which time is cyclical—or, to put it more precisely, universes in which some world lines loop back upon themselves.” Doesn’t this suggest that the clever theories and calculations of our eminent physicists, mathematicians, and logicians are fancy self-contained worlds? (It is no wonder that the creator of *Alice in Wonderland* was a mathematician.) Sometimes, as in the case of Newton’s Theory of Gravitation, we find it possible and profitable to interpret the natural world in terms of the theory. This does not mean that the theory is right but only that it offers a pattern that fits the actualities (I am allergic to the word ‘facts’) for our present purposes. But when a theory leads to patent

absurdities, we don't have to accept it simply because it is consistent in terms of its special conceptual system.

“... Gödel has proved that there are solutions to Einstein's field equations that permit looping pathways.” There are ‘solutions’: this means no more than that we can invent imaginary closed conceptual systems that permit etc. etc. Long before H. G. Wells and Kurt Gödel and Stephen Hawking we had wizards and witches and faeries and we had the admirable Alice with her Wonderland and Looking Glass. All of these are ‘possible’ imaginary worlds: does that make them possible actual worlds? And they are all less fantastic than the ‘possible worlds’ of our learned scientists and philosophers. The Medievals readily dropped a proposition once it was shown to involve a *reduction ad absurdum*, but that only makes it more attractive for our ‘scientifically-minded’ moderns. Our

metaphysicians also gave us consistent possible worlds. They only erred when they thought that their rationally possible worlds are a true account of the actual world/

Count me a fool or worse, I will say it: Our most eminent physicists, mathematicians, astrophysicists, and quantum mechanics pundits are victims to a self-induced insanity. They cannot differentiate between the imaginary self-enclosed conceptual worlds they create and the actual world. They are only less harmful (for the time being) than our mighty economists who believe their own analyses and predictions.

October 1, 2016

PHILOSOPHY PATHWAYS
SPECIAL ISSUE NO.206

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Edited by D. R. Khashaba

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EDITOR'S PREFATORY NOTE

Honestly, I do not feel like apologizing
for my egotism in taking up the whole

of this Philosophy Pathways Issue for myself. I wanted to take the opportunity generously afforded me by Dr. Geoffrey Klempner to present a summing up of my philosophy. Having entered my ninetieth year it is high time for that. Indeed it is because I cannot now reasonably expect to have much longer to live that I sought to make all my books freely available to all readers, first on <https://philosophia937.wordpress.com> and then on <https://archive.org> [search: D. R. Khashaba]. I shall be obliged to anyone who would care to download any or all of them.

In this Issue of Philosophy Pathways my aim was to write three condensed accounts of three aspects of my work which together give a fairly comprehensive summary of my philosophy.

The first paper, “Philosophy as Poetry”, presents an uncommon conception of the nature of philosophical thinking, at any rate as far as what I would call ‘philosophy proper’ is concerned.

The second paper, “Becoming as Creativity”, introduces the Principle of Creativity as an answer both to the problem of becoming – usually buried under the quandaries and puzzles of ‘causation’ – and to the riddle of Free Will.

The third paper, “Eternity and Freedom”, unites axiology and ontology in an original conception of Eternity. Only in Plato and Spinoza are axiology and ontology so closely knit together.

Although I have written these three pieces especially for this Philosophy Pathways issue, it was inevitable that they should resound, reiterate, and repeat what I have been saying in all my

writings hitherto, sometimes in the very same words.

D. R. Khashaba

Email: dkhashaba@yahoo.com

Blog: <http://khashaba.blogspot.com>

Site:

<https://philosophia937.wordpress.com>

All my books are freely available on this site and also on <https://archive.org> [search: D. R. Khashaba].

I. PHILOSOPHY AS POETRY

D. R. Khashaba

There is no agreed answer to the question: What is philosophy? If we try to apply Wittgenstein's "the meaning is the use" to philosophy we get nowhere. Wittgenstein's notion of "family resemblances" may be more helpful, though in the case of philosophy the family members are an odd discordant bunch especially if we take in the youngest generation. Let us try the historical approach, though here too we have more diversity than affinity. Even if we confine ourselves in time to the flicker between the sixth and the fourth centuries BC and in space to that tiny speck in the north-eastern

Mediterranean, who would say that Thales and Xenophanes, or Heraclitus and Anaxagoras, or Empedocles and Socrates represent a homogeneous genre of thinking? What I propose therefore is to separate a line of thought that began and apparently ended with two unique figures: Socrates and Plato — to isolate that line of thought and give it a distinctive name. For want of anything better I call it ‘philosophy proper’ without denying the other family members the right to the proud family name of Philosophy. [See “Philosophy as Prophecy” in *The Sphinx and the Phoenix*, download: <https://archive.org/details/THESPHINXANDTHEPHOENIX> and “Two Kinds of Metaphysics” in *Plato’s Universe of Discourse*, download: <https://archive.org/details/PlatosUniverseOfDiscourse>]

At his trial Socrates declares it to be his life-mission to live philosophizing and

examining himself and others (*Apology* 28e) and these were for him not two things but one: to philosophize is to probe one's beliefs, one's values, one's purpose in life. An unexamined life, he maintains, is not a life for a human being (38a). This belief was well-grounded in his philosophical thought. For the greatest good, the only proper good, for a human being is to have a healthy soul, and the wholesomeness of the soul consists just in being clear about this insight: that nothing is ultimately good but what prospers the wellbeing of the soul and nothing is truly evil but what harms the soul. Thus all good, all understanding, all wisdom resides in the wholesomeness of our inner reality, our *psuchê* (soul) — variously designated by *nous*, *phronêsis*, *sophia*, or by the unfortunate blanket term *epistêmê*. All else can only be relatively and conditionally good

when it conduces to that one ultimate good.

And as all things in the external world are in themselves as nothing to our true good, so all knowledge of the outer natural world is essentially irrelevant to what is ultimately real and to the one insight on which our true good depends. Plato emphasized and highlighted this view. All things in the natural world have only a mock ‘reality’. When the mind investigates what we have come to call the phenomenal world, making use of the body – or as we would now say, making use of empirical data – in considering anything, it is dragged by the body into the changeable and is then led into error and is confused and dizzied and is drunken (*Phaedo* 79c). In modern parlance: the empirical investigation of the natural world is confined to the phenomenal. But when the mind “all by itself reflects, it moves into that which is pure, always is, ...

remains with that always, ... and then it rests from wandering, and in the company of that, is constant, being in communion with such; and it is this state that is called *phronêsis*” (*Phaedo* 79d). As all good and all understanding reside for Socrates in the soul (mind) so for Plato all reality, all that is really real, is nowhere to be beheld but in our own inner reality. So in the *Republic* the philosophical quest is summed up in the following words:

“Would we not be making a reasonable defence when we say that a true philosophical nature aspires to what IS, does not tarry by the many particulars that are thought to be, but goes forth with no blunting and no slackening of her desire, until she grasps the essence of every reality by that in her soul to which it is becoming – namely, what is akin – to grasp that, approaching and mingling

with what has true being, gives birth to reason and reality; enjoys knowledge and true life and is nourished, and then has relief of her birth pangs, but not before then?" (490a-b.)

As all understanding for Socrates comes from probing our mind so for Plato all insight into reality comes from communion with our inner reality. That inner reality, which is the only reality and all the reality we are vouchsafed to approach, is represented in the *Republic* by the Form of the Good. But the Form of the Good is beyond being and beyond understanding. We can commune with it in philosophical insight, in poetic and artistic creativity, in mystic experience, but it cannot be conveyed in any determinate formulation of thought or words. It can only be intimated in conceptual myths, in poetic visions, in the creations of artistic genius.

In all of this there is no inferential reasoning, no argumentation in the narrower sense of the term, but oracular proclamation. In all genuine philosophy rationalistic reasoning and argumentation can have only an ancillary role for the purposes of exposition and elucidation. Look at Schopenhauer's *World as Will and Idea*; look at Whitehead's *Process and Reality* (to pick up two examples that come to mind), you will find no pretence of inferential reasoning or logical proof. A philosopher's profoundest insights are not arrived at by reasoning; they are creative notions that render aspects of living experience intelligible.

Thus what I call philosophy proper is poetry oracularly proclaiming the philosopher's insight into the one reality of which we have immediate cognizance, our own inner reality.

Hence I gave my latest book, *Creative Eternity*, the subtitle “a metaphysical myth” and explained in the first chapter why it had to be a myth. [Download: <https://archive.org/details/CreativeEternityAMetaphysicalMyth>]

D. R. Khashaba

II. BECOMING AS CREATIVITY

D. R. Khashaba

What makes a thing bring about another thing different from itself? What sense is there in saying that what has become comes from what was before? We are so immersed in change that our sense of wonder is blunted and we come to take the becoming of one thing out of another as the most natural of things. Yet reflection should make it plain that for one thing to produce or to become another thing different from itself is truly mystifying. To describe in minutest detail the stages through which the sprout passes in coming out of the seed only gives us the delusion of understanding but the mystery remains

unfathomable; and such is all so-called scientific explanation. Indeed we cannot find a single instance of one particular thing bringing about another: we always have a combination of circumstances or elements in the first place, but that does not make things any better. So in the case of the sprout to bring in the role of the soil and water and sunrays does not make the mystery less mysterious.

The term 'cause' is an empty word, a veil to hide our ignorance. Newton named the mysterious thing behind one body attracting or being attracted by another gravitation but he confessed he had no idea what that might be. In all the so-called explanations provided by science for natural happenings we have a description of contributing elements or an account or successive stages. Such knowledge of what goes on in the coming about of any given state of affairs is practically useful. That is the stuff of all of our empirical science. It

enables us to anticipate, to control, to manipulate, natural processes. But we deceive ourselves when we think it explains anything. All we know, as Hume insisted, is that one thing follows another.

Bertrand Russell found that we can do without the notion of cause; all we need are the laws of nature (“On the Notion of Cause, with Applications to the Free-Will Problem”). But the laws of nature are patterns we formulate, descriptive of natural processes, and luckily find them fitting natural processes to a satisfactory degree of accuracy. To speak of ‘Laws of Nature’ as explaining – or worse still, as causing or governing – the goings on in nature is utter folly, though readily condoned by eminently brilliant scientists and philosophers. (They are not stupid; they simply do not have the philosophical urge to understand; instead they have the practical drive to control and manipulate the natural

process.) Wittgenstein rightly said:
“The whole modern conception of the world is founded on the illusion that the so-called laws of nature are the explanations of natural phenomena” (*Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, 6.371, tr. Pears and McGuinness).

In the *Phaedo* Socrates presents the fundamental insight that it is by the ideas created by the mind that a thing has meaning for us, becomes what it is for us: it is by the idea of Beauty that we find anything beautifully (95e-102a). [See Chapter Five, “The Meaning of the *Phaedo*” in, *Plato: An Interpretation*, download: <https://archive.org/details/PlatoAnInterpretation>]. Plato (in what is referred to as the final argument for immortality) derives from this a ‘method of explanation’: a thing becomes hot when it is imbued with the form of heat. I see this as one of Plato’s whimsical excursions into theorizing and in any

case this is not how a thing comes to be but how it becomes intelligible to us in itself.

Aristotle busied himself with the problem of causation and came up with not one but four 'causes' for a thing, none of which is a cause in any satisfactory sense. The formal cause is just the shadow of the Socratic-Platonic form. The material cause is what we start with, what the thing was before it became what it has become. The final cause, in the case of man-made things, is the end or purpose of the activity that brings the thing about. The efficient cause, again in the case of man-made things, is the maker, and it is the model after which the God of monotheistic theology is fashioned. Aristotle's doctrine of four causes is a good exercise in analysis but it explains nothing.

The dialectical thesis-antithesis-synthesis commonly attributed to Hegel takes the scientific idea of a natural law to its apex: it is a formal abstract pattern, or rather a paradigm, of natural laws, that luckily fits many happenings. It may be a good rule for guiding our analyses of happenings, but it explains nothing and definitely, in itself, brings about nothing.

Thus all the wrestlings of thinkers with the problem of how things come about have, or should have, one result: to awaken our wonder and heighten our awareness that becoming – the playful metamorphosis of all things, going all around us all the time – is an ultimate riddle. And the key to the riddle is within us. The only intelligible becoming of which we have immediate cognizance is the spontaneous becoming of our thoughts and deeds. I am writing these lines; nothing causes my thoughts or the words in which I

clothe my thoughts; my thoughts and my words creatively outflow from my inner being. When the mind communes with its inner reality, Plato says, it gives birth to reason and reality (*Republic* 490a-b). My simplest acts burst out of my total being as a plant sprouts out of the seed; my deepest feelings gush out from my innermost reality. All the analyses of physiologists and neurologists are external descriptions that explain nothing. Shelley cannot find any explanation for the singing of the Skylark but that the happy bird pours its “full heart / In profuse strains of unpremeditated art”. And why should not the skylark be happy? What do we know of the innermost state of things? Except that we dress our ignorance in the garb of science.

The only way I can find any becoming intelligible is to see all being and all becoming as creative. All things, all deeds, all states of being have

antecedents; the antecedent does not cause the consequent but creatively flowers in the consequent. Modern philosophers have needlessly made a problem of free will. They readily believe their immediate awareness of their free action because it is thought to be incompatible with the fiction of causal determinism. Beside overlooking the consideration that 'laws of nature' do not cause or explain natural processes, they pay no regard to the consideration that all 'laws of nature' are abstract approximations. How do we know that the most common phenomenal occurrence, good-naturedly complying with our predictions and expectations, does not actually come with a difference, just as a singer, singing to the score, cannot but sing differently every time if only because the singer's larynx and whole body never ceases changing from moment to moment? How can the most accurate calculation

of the Earth's revolution around the sun not be an approximation when the sun, the earth, and all the stuff in between, never cease to change? Surely the sun this hour is not what it was earlier this morning and the Earth today has suffered change since yesterday; and this is not philosophy but the strictest of science. Nature never does the same thing twice without some delicate modulation, even if that escapes our gross senses and our gross instruments. Of all modern scientists, Einstein was the one who saw this clearly and expressed it lucidly: "As far as the laws of mathematics refer to reality, they are not certain, as far as they are certain, they do not refer to reality", he said.

The pseudo-problem of 'free will' has been needlessly complicated by confusing free will with freedom of choice. Choice and deliberation are, strictly, not instances of freedom but of constraint. It is in so far as we are

imperfect and subject to external influences that we have to deliberate and to make choices which are always conditioned by antecedents. We are truly free in spontaneous moral and creative activity. But not only on that exalted level do we act freely. The humblest of our daily motions are free: I take a sip of coffee because I will it; I get up and walk to the window because I will it. Socrates explains that he remains in prison to face death not because his bones and joints and sinews necessitate it but because he will be true to his convictions (*Phaedo* 98c-e). The word 'will' itself is misleading when we think of will as a faculty. The materialist Hobbes knew better than the rationalists and idealists: there is no Will; there is only willing (*Leviathan*, Part I., chap.VI); the act is fully spontaneous. But the materialists are wrong when they think the willing is produced by what can be subjected to

objective observation whatever that might be. The willing wells up from nowhere, or rather from the non-existent personality (the ‘transcendent’ reality of the person). (For the seemingly occult notion of ‘non-existent reality’ see under “Eternity and Freedom” below.) When we act freely it is our whole being that outflows freely in the act. A little baby’s happy giggle is the free outflow of the baby’s wellbeing. Again when scientists speak of glands and chemical processes and neural what not, I say: Thank you, that is very interesting; but if you think that causes or explains the happy giggle you are misusing the term ‘explain’.

In the *Timaeus* Plato mythically says that the *demiourgos* made the world because, being good, he wanted to propagate his goodness. In the *Republic* the Form of the Good is the source of all life, all being, all understanding. That is the only intelligible view of the

source of the world. Ultimate Reality being intelligent and good outflows creatively – or as Plotinus would put it, emanates – in the universe of being and becoming and it is the ultimate creativity of Reality that creatively sustains and creatively renews everything and is the only intelligible ground for all being and all becoming.

D. R. Khashaba

III. ETERMITY AND FREEDOM

D. R. Khashaba

The conceptual intellect is the glory and the doom of humankind. It is in virtue of our conceptual thought that we have our special character, distinguishing us from all other animals, and it is in all probability, as it now seems, by this same intellect and our vaunted reason that the human species will be led to its final annihilation. So conceptual intellection is the peculiar property of human beings but it is not what is best or what is most valuable in them. There is in us a deeper, purer, intelligence — in our body, in the tranquility of serene solitude, in moments when we are struck with awe and wonder, in the gasp

we eject at the sight of beauty, in the gush of love when soul opens to soul, in the flow of tenderness towards a helpless creature, in the happy giggle of a baby, in the exuberance of poetic creativity — in all of that there is a deeper, purer intelligence, a state of pure internal joyful illumination, and I find that deep, pure, intelligence in the warbling of the bird and in the dance of the butterfly. When Shelley addresses the Skylark saying, “Teach me half the gladness / That thy brain must know”, he is addressing the fount of Life at the heart of all Being.

From the beginning of human existence the best individuals at their best moments — when one all by oneself is one with the whole of Nature — yearned for communion with the intelligence in the All and aspired for union with the All. The sages, the mystics, the inspired poets, found that communion with the All within themselves, in their inmost

reality. “I searched myself”, says Heraclitus. The best philosophy seeks to rouse our awareness of that fount of intelligence in us and in the whole of reality. Thus the profoundest thinkers found all things in the One and found the One in all things.

Heraclitus found one Logos in all things and found all reality and all understanding in the hidden depths of the unfathomable soul.

Socrates sought the good and found the good in understanding; yet that understanding is understanding of no other thing than the good; and in the end the good is found to be no other than the wholesomeness of the soul, the integrity of that inner reality of ours that is fostered by doing what is right and is harmed by doing what is wrong.

Some twenty-two centuries later we find Spinoza saying: “We know nothing to be certainly good ... save what is

truly conducive to understanding ...” (*Ethics*, IV. XXVII). Spinoza goes on to say: “The greatest good of the mind is the knowledge of God, and the greatest virtue of the mind is to know God” (IV. XXVIII). And we should note that for Spinoza God is the one Substance, the one all-embracing Reality, “that which is in itself and is conceived through itself” (First Part, Definitions, III). Kant sums it all up in saying that nothing is absolutely good except a good will.

For Plato only what is wholly real is wholly intelligible (*Republic* 477a) and only one who sees things as a whole is a philosopher (*Republic* 537c). And the wholly real and wholly intelligible is represented by Plato as the Form of the Good, which is yet beyond being and beyond understanding. — How all these seemingly various views coalesce will, I hope, be clear from what follows.

When we probe deep enough we find that the questions: 'What is real?', 'What is ultimate reality?', 'What is the good?', 'How do we know reality?', are not so many questions but are aspects of one question, variations of the one mystery that haunts all reflective minds. Multitudinous wayward answers have been and are being offered, every one good in its way but, as determinate theories or supposedly definitive answers, they all crumble under the weight of their own intrinsic contradictoriness. In the end the mind can only find rest in that insight shared by poets and mystics and expressed by the Hindu wisdom in the words of the Upanishads: "Thou Art That". For in the end we find that the restless, irking, questioning Intelligence is itself all the reality, all the understanding, all the good we know or can ever know.

That inner intelligence, that inner reality of ours, is not a substance; it is

nowhere; it is simply our inwardness, our subjectivity. It is what Kant referred to as the transcendental unity of apperception and laboured in vain to give an account of. We may call it the principle of our unity, of our wholeness, of our creativity. It cannot be located, cannot be ‘observed’, because it is not in the nature of inwardness to be objectified; it can only be beheld in the immediacy of living intelligent spontaneity. It is pure creativity, an instance of the creativity that is the ungrounded ground of all that is. I harp on this because the notion of the real that does not exist and cannot exist because it is real — this notion is novel and is not easy to grasp since it flies in the face of common thought and common language.

Thus the one reality that is our own inner reality cannot be placed or found anywhere in space or time because, being the Unconditioned *par excellence*,

it cannot be a thing conditioned by space or time or constrained in a determinate formulation of thought or language.

At our best, when we are happiest and most blessed, when we are truly our true selves, we are givers and creators. In spontaneous good deeds, in poetic and artistic creation, we are outflowing intelligence, outflowing virtue, outflowing love. Only then do we have true being transcending the ephemerality of our bodied being: only in the spontaneity of love and in poetic and artistic creativity do we have true being and intelligence and goodness. Only then are we true to the intelligence that is our inner reality and is part of the intelligent creativity of the All — that Power “Which wields the world with never-wearied love, / Sustains it from beneath, and kindles it above” (Shelley, *Adonais*).

What most strikes a reflective mind contemplating the natural world is its mutability and fugitiveness. Not only do all living things die and come to dust but in the long view the massive mountains have no more permanence or stability than the rainbow; the stars and galaxies in the height of their splendour are dying, constantly burning themselves out. All that is in this world of change is and is not, for to exist, to be a particular this, a particular whar, is to be grounded in non-being. It is a mockery to call it real. Thus the Hindu sages saw the world as *maya*. To exist is to be constrained by Where and When, to be There and Then, to be determined by and dependent on all that the particular existent is not. Thus Existence is grounded in imperfection; its law is transience. (If I remember correctly, this is the gist of the first Part of Bradley's *Appearance and Reality*.) Hence the universal flux. Nothing that

exists lasts, to exist is to be evanescent.
“Fire lives the death of earth and *aêr*
lives the death of fire, water lives the
death of *aêr*, earth that of water.”
(Heraclitus, tr. Richard D. McKirahan
and Patricia Curd.) Existence is the
original sin that brings death in its
wake. Plato never wearied of
emphasizing the unreality of all things
in the world.

By contrast what is real has been
conceived as permanent, constant, and
unchanging, such as the One of
Parmenides. Even Plato, for a time, in
theory, voiced this error, until he saw its
incompatibility with his profounder
insight into Reality as creative, as
procreation in beauty (*Symposium*). In
the *Republic* the Form of the Good,
while beyond being and beyond
understanding, brings forth all being, all
life, all understanding. In the *Sophist* ,
first we have the crucial statement that
things that are, are no other thing than

activity, *ta onta hôs estin ouk allo ti plên dunamis* (247e), and then, arguing against the ‘Friends of the Forms’ who took his poetic flights about the immutability of the Forms too literally and narrowly, he says: “But tell me, in heaven’s name: are we really to be so easily convinced that change, life, soul, understanding have no place in that which is perfectly real — that it has neither life nor thought, but stands immutable in solemn aloofness, devoid of intelligence?” (248e-249a, tr. Cornford.) In the *Timaeus* Plato says that the maker of the universe made it because, being good, he wished all things to share in his goodness (29d-e). All of this does not signify any reversal or change in Plato’s fundamental outlook. I maintain that the creativity of all that is real is of the essence of Plato’s thought, but this is not the place to argue that out.

All perfection, all goodness, all understanding, is creative and the ultimately real is pure creativity.

Ultimate Reality is not an entity, not a This, not a What, for all determinate actuality is necessarily transient since it is grounded in non-being. Reality is the negation of thingness as it is the negation of existence. What is fully real does not exist but outflows in transient existents. If we name Reality God, it is blasphemy to say that God exists.

Ultimate Reality is pure Act, pure Creativity: it is not an agent that is active, not a god that is creative, but sheer creativity. I ordinarily say that ultimate Reality is creative intelligence but find fault with that expression; it is rather intelligent creativity. The perfection of Being is creativity *sans* a creator and the perfection of Goodness is the same creativity *sans* a creator. I name it Creative Eternity.

Eternity is not extended time or limitless time; it is the negation of temporality as it is the negation of all actuality. Eternity is Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva all in one: it is the eternal Act, it is Love, it is the Form of the Good that, being beyond all being and beyond all understanding, brings forth all evanescent being and goodness and beauty and intelligence.

Thus, in attempting to comprehend the mysteries of Being, of Life, of Goodness, of Understanding, we end up with the mystery of mysteries that we yet come face to face with in the mystery of our own inner reality that is pure intelligent creativity.

We end where we began, our Omega is proclaimed in our Alpha, and I can say with Parmenides “For me, it is indifferent from where I am to begin: for that is where I will arrive back again.”

UNDERSTANDING ANIMAL MINDS

I have been reading an intriguing article by Brandon Keim on recent and ongoing scientific research and scientific thinking on animal minds:

<http://www.chronicle.com/article/Animal-Minds/237915>

I do not intend to comment on the article since it is mainly outside my range. I will only give a couple of marginal reflections.

At one point we are told that Georg Streidter “noted that fish have demonstrated many (...) cognitive feats. These include the ability to count,

as described in angel fish who differentiate between schools with different numbers of individuals ...”. What strikes me here is that the word ‘count’ seems to be used with peculiar nonchalance. To “differentiate between schools with different numbers of individuals” is not to count. A one-year-old child knows the difference between ‘big’ and ‘biiiig’ spoken with outstretched arms. A savage who cannot count three will know the difference between a horde of a hundred bison and one of a thousand bison. To count involves the application of the conceptual number series. Whether certain animals have something corresponding to conceptual thinking is a distinct question. What I object to here is the loose use of the term ‘count’.

It is admitted that “the nature of subjective experience is only partially accessible to objective science” (Gordon Burghardt). Nevertheless

Burghardt goes on to say that “we must keep trying to understand it.” There’s the rub! I would not say that the nature of subjective experience “is only partially accessible to objective science”; it is totally inaccessible to objective science. What scientists investigate in their sophisticated experimentations and observations is not the nature of subjective experience – which can only be known in the inwardness of one’s own subjective experience – but external manifestations and indications. A person born deaf may study musical notation. May even appreciate the mathematical concordance in a musical score. But she or he can never know the experience of listening to a melody. That must be individually experienced.

Indeed I would say that the differences and controversies between scientists in interpreting the results of scientific experimentations arise

because one class of scientists are actually posing and trying to answer philosophical questions about subjective experience while other scientists are content to give objective accounts of the results.

In referring to raising and trying to answer philosophical questions about subjective experience I do not mean that there are philosophical answers to these questions. A philosopher probing her or his subjective experience cannot explain the nature of the subjective but can only – equally with the poet and the artist – give symbolic intimations of their inner reality.

What best we gain from the scientists' interest in studying our kin in the animal kingdom is a widening of our sympathies and a release from the arrogant illusion of human uniqueness and human superiority.

When we read that “insects, too,
would appear to be conscious” I find in
that corroboration of my conviction that
living intelligence is the metaphysical
ground of all Being.

Cairo, October 26, 2016

WHAT IS THE SOUL?

Some time ago, borrowing Berkeley's Hylas and Philonous, I composed a short dialogue between the two on the reality of the mind. Here's another encounter between Berkeley's brain *ekgonoi*.

HYLAS: To the question "What is the soul?" I have the short answer: There is no such thing.

PHILONOUS: I will surprise you my good friend. I entirely agree with you. There can be no such thing as the soul.

H.: I am delighted to see that you have accepted my viewpoint.

Ph.: There I'm afraid I have to disappoint you. You cannot deny that we think, we feel, we love, we joy in beauty and experience wonder. Your positivist philosophy cannot explain these realities.

H.: I do not deny that we have psychic states, mental operations, emotional experiences, but these are all products of physiological and neural motions.

Ph.: As you admit there are psychic and mental states and operations, I in turn readily admit there are physiological and neural motions. It is the word 'products' that I object to.

H.: How so?

Ph.: You speak as if we understood or could ever understand how from motions in the brain there could result a psychic state or a thought — something of a completely different nature. We fool ourselves with words, my friend, when we speak of one thing causing

another thing or of anything coming out of anything different from itself.

H.: But the physiological operations and the brain motions are all that we can objectively ascertain.

Ph.: You observe these operations and motions, you quantify them, you measure them, you experiment with them, but you never know what in themselves they are. They are all externally given – or in your jargon *data* – that you have to accept on trust. I on the other hand immediately know the reality of my thoughts, my feelings, my spontaneously willed acts.

H.: But you must have a substratum for your psychic states and mental operations.

Ph.: This is another fiction like the fiction of causation. To me, the activity, not the actor, is the reality.

H.: So we are back to our starting point: there is no such a thing as soul or mind.

Ph.: Only in the sense that the soul or mind is not a thing but is pure activity, pure creative activity. The soul or mind cannot be an objective thing since soul or mind is the subjectivity of the subject. The soul is the transcendent reality of the person, the principle of integrity and the principle of creativity of the person. In other words, the personality of the person, our subjectivity, our inner reality, is the one reality and all the reality we know immediately and indubitably. If we want a model for ultimate Reality I can find no other than our intelligent creativity.

H.: Call me stupid, but what you're saying means nothing to me.

Ph.: You are not stupid my friend and I do not pretend to be more intelligent than you are. But you're objectively

oriented. Plato in the *Sophist* expected the battle between the idealists and the materialists to rage to the end of time. Aristotle was not less intelligent than Plato but could not see things as Plato saw them. So let us say you are an Aristotelian and I am a Platonist and let us part as friends.

October 30, 2016

THE CONSCIOUSNESS PUZZLE

Scientists and positivist philosophers have brazenly denied there is such a thing as mind, but, to my knowledge, consciousness was not so brashly written off, perhaps because biologists have seen consciousness as the distinctive mark of the human species; yet it has always been a puzzle to modern thinkers.

Aeon has published an essay by Professor Anil K. Seth on the puzzle of consciousness:

<https://aeon.co/essays/the-hard-problem-of-consciousness-is-a-distraction-from-the-real-one> I expect I

will have some comments to make but even before I start reading let me state my position bluntly. First, what makes the puzzle of consciousness seem intractable is the positivist dogma that only what is objectively observable is real. But consciousness cannot be objectified simply because it is our inwardness, our inner reality. I am not saying that consciousness (mind) is an attribute of our reality but that it itself is our whole reality. Secondly, consciousness, like mind, like life, like being, is an ultimate mystery that cannot be reductively explained. We have immediate awareness of our consciousness (mind) because that is our reality; that is what we, as persons, are. I am I. There is nothing to 'explain', nothing to 'understand'. My mind is all the reality and all the understanding there is for me. We are only puzzled because we want to make that ultimate reality conform to the

criteria of what science has taught us to call real, not knowing that what is really real is quite other than that.

Professor Seth at the outset mentions Descartes' bifurcation of the world into 'mind stuff' and 'matter stuff'. That was the fiction that bred endless quandaries for modern philosophy. Descartes made mind (thought) a substance on a par with body (extension). When it was found that the mind did not satisfy the criteria of substantial existence it was simply dropped. Gilbert Ryle labeled it a *deus ex machine*. Then began the Holy Grail quest for finding the mind in the brain, which Seth designates the "more pragmatic approach" of "modern neuroscience". I sense that we are on the wrong track when Seth further says that this approach is "guided by philosophy but doesn't rely on philosophical research to provide the answers". I insist that answers to the

philosophical questions, including questions about the mind, can only be answered by philosophy and not by science. Seth says that “explaining *why consciousness exists at all* is not necessary in order to make progress in revealing its material basis”. I go with that some of the way: investigating the neurological accompaniments and manifestations of mental activity can progress endlessly, but it can never tell us why there is consciousness (mind) or what consciousness (mind) is. Mind is the reality philosophy begins with and has to accept as an ultimate mystery, as the ultimate foundation of all reality including the so-called physical reality.

Professor Seth assures us that at the Sackler Centre for Consciousness Science they “are gaining exciting new insights into consciousness”. Congratulations! but it does not make me alter or modify my position. ‘Consciousness scientists’, like

physicists both on the quantum mechanics end and the galactic end, will continue to make progress, but they deceive themselves if they think they are dealing with reality: they are dealing with phenomena that will continue to lead on to other phenomena without ever reaching what is ultimately real. The only real thing we know or will ever know is our own inner reality and that reality is of a nature totally different from the nature of anything known to science.

I think I have thus said all I have to say on the subject. I will continue reading Seth's essay for enjoyment and to marvel at the wonders revealed by such advanced research which, however marvellous, will not exceed the marvel of the chicken hatching out of the egg. I may only add a note occasionally if what I read spurs a thought now and then.

But at once I find I have to make a comment. Seth refers to David Chalmers' distinction between the 'easy problem' and the 'hard problem'. The easy problem we are told is "to understand how the brain (and body) gives rise to perception, cognition, learning and behavior". We will never understand that if we expect the body, including the brain, to give us the answer. What gives rise to our thoughts, feelings, and actions is not the body but our whole being, our person, which is a reality transcending the body. Then we are told that the hard problem is "to understand why and how any of this should be associated with consciousness at all". Again I maintain that science will never tell us that: the philosophical answer to this problem is that consciousness (mind) is our reality: all our experience and action is "associated with consciousness" because mind is the ultimate ground of all being. The

body cannot explain itself but the reality of the mind is self-evident to the mind and needs no explaining.

Leaving aside both the ‘easy’ and the ‘hard’ problems, Seth proposes to attend to “the *real problem*: how to account for the various properties of consciousness in terms of biological mechanisms ... without worrying too much about explaining its existence”. This is what science has to do and is all that science can do. But it has also to acknowledge that the ‘hard problem’ is a philosophical problem which philosophy alone can answer.

I like what Seth says in explaining the statement that consciousness is ‘informative and highly integrated’ and I could find in it support for my views on creativity and non-repetitiveness in natural processes but I will not go into that here,

I find this fascinating. “Tononi ... argues that consciousness simply *is* integrated information. This is an intriguing and powerful proposal, but it comes at the cost of admitting that consciousness could be present everywhere and in everything, a philosophical view known as panpsychism.” That’s just it. This is a philosophical position that science has nothing to do with and the wider implication that makes it anathema to science is what commends it to philosophical thinking.

I have nothing to say on the rest of the essay. The essay concludes with this statement: “*We are conscious selves because we too are beast machines – self-sustaining flesh-bags that care about their own persistence.*” If you find that ‘because’ in place, that what goes before it follows from what comes after it, I beg you to excuse my stupidity for I can’t see any connection.

(Note: All emphases in quotations above are in the original. I never tamper with quotations by adding or removing emphasis.)

Cairo, November 4, 2016

NOTES ON BERDYAEV'S *SPIRIT AND REALITY*

In *Let Us Philosophize*, first published in 1998, I commented critically on a passage from Berdyaev's "Dostoevsky", quoted by Victor Gollancz in *A Year of Grace*. That was all I had read of Berdyaev until a few days ago when I downloaded excerpts from *Spirit and Reality* (tr. George Reavey). I have been reading these and was struck by the close correspondence between Berdyaev's notion of 'spirit' and the special meaning of 'reality' I have been expounding in all my writings, most recently in *Creative*

Eternity: A Metaphysical Myth (2016). I have been jotting down notes while reading. I give these notes below only slightly edited. (The page numbers cited are as given in the excerpts.)

Berdyaev writes: “In (Kant’s) philosophy are laid the foundations of the only true metaphysics: a dualism of the spheres of freedom and nature ...” (p.8). This may be a fair representation of Kant’s position; but as I see it, Kant stopped at dualism because he had no true metaphysics. He opposed phenomena to the noumenon, and the only noumenon we have direct cognizance of is the human free will. But the phenomenal cannot in itself and by itself be. True metaphysics seeks the one Reality. The separation of the realms of freedom and nature is mere appearance: true metaphysics sees these as Spinoza’s *natura naturans* and *natura naturata*, or, in terms of my

philosophy of Creative Eternity, as Creativity and transient creations.

Berdyaev rejects the monism of the German Idealists in favour of Kant's dualism. Kantian dualism, Berdyaev says, "contains a greater element of eternal truth." To my mind the 'eternal truth' Berdyaev finds in dualism is only its agreement with his monotheistic Christianity. He castigates the German Idealists' monism as "a type of self-objectifying and self-hypostasizing thought" (p.8). I both agree and differ. The German Idealists were wrong in thinking their 'self-hypostasizations' are objective representations of the All. Had they confessed that they were only giving mythical expression to the reality they find within themselves they would have been blameless, for that is all metaphysics can do and is required to do.

I find in a paragraph of Berdyaev's (on p.10) an amazing correspondence between his understanding of 'spirit' and what I have been trying to convey in my special usage of the term 'reality' (which I also name 'creativity' and 'eternity'). Had I read this paragraph earlier I would have quoted it to clarify and support my usage and might have thought of adopting the term 'spirit' to replace the term 'reality' which has caused so much misunderstanding of my position. I quote Berdyaev's paragraph (somewhat abridged) followed by a short explanatory note:

“Spirit is neither an objective reality nor a rational category of being. Spirit has never existed, nor can it exist anywhere, in the form of a real object. The philosophy of spirit should not be a philosophy of being or an ontology, but a philosophy of existence. Spirit is not only a reality of a different kind

... [part of the text here seems to be garbled] ... but it is an altogether different reality. To make use of Kantian terminology ... we may affirm that the reality of spirit is that of freedom rather than that of nature. Spirit is never an object, nor is spiritual reality an objective one.” (p.10)

Berdyaev's use of the terms 'reality' and 'existence' is the exact opposite of mine, but this is only a difference of terminology (and I am not sure how much of this may be due to the English translation). When Berdyaev asserts that the philosophy of spirit “should not be a philosophy of being or an ontology” I tend to think that this follows from Berdyaev's Christian theism which does not permit him to have a true ontology. But the statements “Spirit has never existed, nor can it exist anywhere” and “Spirit is never an object, nor is spiritual reality an objective one” could

have been culled out of any of my books, from *Let Us Philosophize* (1998, 2008) through *Quest of Reality* (2013) to *Creative Eternity* (2016), only replacing the word ‘spirit’ in Berdyaev’s text with ‘reality’ in mine. (See Part III of *Creative Eternity* especially chapters Omicron and Rho.)

Here again is something that matches what I have been saying in all my writings except for some difference in terminology: “Spiritual states do not correspond to anything, they simply *are*; they are the prime reality, they are more existential than anything reflected in the objective world.” (p.12) Except for this last phrase couched in Existentialist language, I have expressed the same thought time and again — most lately in a blog I posted on November 4, 2016 9”The Consciousness Puzzle”).

Of course the correspondence between Berdyaev's philosophy and mine is not complete. It is his conception of 'spirit' that agrees completely with my conception of metaphysical reality. I do not want to go into the differences between the two positions.

Again when Berdyaev says that "freedom, meaning, creativity, integrity, love, value, an orientation towards the highest Divine world and union with it" are among the attributes of spirit (p.33) — if you were to put this statement before me and tell me you have taken it out of one of my books I would have had no reason to doubt it.

There is much else that I could have quoted from other pages, but that would add nothing essential to the above quotations and remarks.

Berdyaev repeatedly speaks of the creativity or creativeness of spirit. I say that reality (mind) is creativity, sheer

creativity. In my philosophy creativity is the ultimately real: this is what I name Creative Eternity. Ultimate Reality is not a substance, not mind as an entity, but pure intelligent creativity. I have said this repeatedly in these very words. It bears repetition because it challenges current modes of thought and language. Hence I was overjoyed when I found Berdyaev's notion of spirit so closely corresponding to what I say of what is ultimately real.

Marginally: Berdyaev says: "The Christian revelation is unrecognizable in historical Christianity." (p.58) Does this echo Kierkegaard?

Berdyaev's Christian faith signifies that the surface correspondence between his statements and mine may hide fundamental differences.

I find particular significance in the statement "in mysticism God reveals Himself in man" (p.85) — 'in man'

rather than ‘to man’. For the reality we commune with is within us, is our own inner reality. It is when we ourselves become fully real that we know Reality. Plato sums this up in that oracular passage in *Republic* 490a-b. A God outside us is a fiction, at best a myth acknowledged as a myth. In saying this I know I am parting company with Berdyaev. It may be that in the sentence I quoted he meant to indicate what he found wrong with mysticism.

It is in Chapter I that Berdyaev touches on the metaphysical problem of reality and it is on this chapter that I concentrate. The other chapters are rich in insight (and also full of problematic points) but fall outside the range of what I intended to address in this note. — Still I could not resist voicing some thoughts inspired by Berdyaev’s discussion of mysticism.

Mystics, embracing their traditional faith, relieve themselves of facing the metaphysical problem: they represent their profound experience of their inner reality in terms of the fictions of their faith. Poets and artists represent that experience in their poetic and artistic visions. Philosophers, enthralled by the metaphysical problem, represent their insight into reality in ontological notions and myths. Plato understood that best. The Form of the Good is the paragon of insightful metaphysical myth.

Cairo, November 6, 2016

WHAT IS IT TO BE?

A THOUGHT

Engrossed by the world around us, we think that to be is to be palpable, visible, part of the world that presses in on us and tosses us around. This is the naïve, unreflective view — naïve and unreflective notwithstanding that scientists and empirical philosophers tell us it is the sane, realistic view.

Reflective minds at all times and everywhere have perceived that the world around us is a fleeting shadow and – more significantly – without meaning. Nothing in the world, in itself and by itself, has any meaning.

For reflective minds to be is to be meaningful, to be is to be intelligible.

Parmenides declares: To be intelligible and to be is the same (thing).

(Parmenides said: *tauto gar esti noein te*

kai einai, and again, *to gar auto noein estin te kai einai*, but he we empty Parmenides's dictum of its true significance if we identify it with Descartes's: *Je pense donc je suis*. By *noein* he meant not 'to think' but 'to be thought', to be intelligible.)

When Socrates in the *Phaedo* asks: "Do we say there is such a thing as death? (*hêgoumetha ti ton thanaton einai*;) he does not imply that death exists as a thing but that the word death means something to us. It is instructive that we find it difficult to make this plain in any normal formulation of language and this is what makes it so difficult to convey the notion of pure being, pure metaphysical reality, in ordinary language and makes it difficult for minds constrained by normal language and normal modes of thought to grasp the notion of metaphysical reality.

This would be a good criterion for distinguishing philosophical minds from non-philosophical minds: for a philosophical mind the real is the ideal, the meaningful, the intelligible; for the non-philosophical mind, be it a Dr. Johnson or a Gilbert Ryle, the real is what can be seen touched, measured, weighed. These two classes are what Plato dubbed the Gods and the Giants respectively. It is a travesty to call the latter – however learned, however astute – philosophers.

Cairo, November 7, 2016

SOCRATES' IGNORANCE

Socrates regularly affirmed that he knew nothing. This was not mock modesty, nor was it irony though he did practice irony when he pretended that he expected to be enlightened by his interlocutors. Socrates' declaration of ignorance issued from a profound insight.

When Socrates said that he knew nothing he intimated that all our vaunted knowledge – scientific and practical – is in itself worthless. The only worthwhile 'knowledge' is the understanding of oneself; that alone is wisdom and that is the whole of

philosophy. But the secret depths of our inner reality are, in the strictest sense of the word, infinite and inexhaustible.

Hence the philosophical quest for knowing oneself is an endless lifelong probing into our inner reality. The insights we glimpse in probing our inner reality are all the light we have and those insights are strictly ineffable and can only be intimated in parable, allegory, and myth.

In the so-called elenctic discourses of Socrates, we find that the most highly valued virtues are worthless or even harmful if not enlightened by 'knowledge' (*epistêmê*) and when we try to find what knowledge is that, we discover that it is no particular knowledge but is the virtue we were investigating. Our quest goes in circles because all the good, all the wisdom we have, begins and ends in a wholesome soul, and in all our investigation and all our philosophizing we were doing

nothing but trying to explore that unfathomable soul.

This I call the Principle of Philosophical Ignorance. All genuine philosophy begins and ends in probing our inner unfathomable, inexhaustible, and ineffable reality. All other knowledge – however sophisticated, however astute – Plato relegated to the realm of *doxa* (opinion). Philosophizing alone – the endless probing into our inner reality – he honoured with the name *nous*, *phronêsis*.

COROLLARY I: Philosophy and science are two totally distinct spheres that have nothing whatever to do with each other. This is a theme I will revert to in another blog.

COROLLARY II: Philosophy is not a science and is not cumulative knowledge. All genuine philosophers give creative expression to their personal insight into their inner reality

and since the expression is mythical, no two genuine philosophers contradict each other.

November 10, 2016

A NOTE ON THE PUZZLE OF CONSCIOUSNESS

Why should we find consciousness so puzzling? We are immediately aware that we are aware that we are, in the same way that we know that we are alive. Most of us accept the fact that we are alive simply without finding anything problematic about that: it is only when we think of Life in the abstract that we are faced with problems. In the case of consciousness however we – or at least certain erudite scientists and philosophers – seem to find the fact itself that we are conscious to be problematic. I think this contrast in attitude to life on the one hand and to

consciousness on the other hand is revealing.

Scientists and empiricist philosophers have ceased to puzzle about life because they think that the sciences of life have adequately explained life. This is a delusion. Biochemistry and evolution and genetics and what-not have given us a fair measure of control on life processes and that is what scientists and empiricist philosophers take to be explanation and understanding. I maintain that even if we succeed in turning inorganic matter into a living organism we will not thereby have explained or understood the mystery of life. We will only have prodded Nature to do in a short time what she previously did in a (humanly speaking) very long time. As Shakespeare has it

“... nature is made better by no mean
But nature makes that mean: so, over
that art

Which you say adds to nature, is an art
That nature makes.”

The mystery of life remains
unexplained and unexplainable. To lose
our sense of wonder at the mystery is
nothing but a blunting of our spirit: it is
to be bereft of our sense of
philosophical ignorance, and that is to
suffer what Socrates branded as the
worst *amathia* (ignorance).

Neuroscience and the so-called
philosophy of mind have not yet
matched the achievements of the
biosciences. That is why they (or at any
rate some of them) have not yet lost all
trace of puzzlement at the fact that we
are somehow aware of — of what?
Aware of our inner reality that is just
that awareness itself: this mysterious
and obstinate awareness that empiricists
and positivists vainly tried to exorcise
by dubbing it epiphenomenon or
phosphorescence or *deus ex machina*.

They will not have rest until they realize that all their researches are examinations of the objective ephemeral manifestations of the unapproachable reality of mind or consciousness. I say the reality of mind or consciousness because this is the reality, the only reality, we are immediately and indubitably aware of — a reality more certain and more stable than all we can observe or detect in the outer world from neurons to galaxies to quantum uncertainties. Scientists will continue to discover marvels in the workings of the human brain, and perhaps greater marvels in the brain of an ant or a gnat, but they will never explain away or explain mind or consciousness because this is an ultimate reality, an ultimate mystery, more certain and more obstinate than the Big Bang or the curvature of spacetime.

November 26, 2016

WHY STUDY PHILOSOPHY?

Why study philosophy? If the question is taken in the sense of ‘Why should anyone study philosophy?’ the answer is: ‘There is no reason whatsoever why anyone should study philosophy’. One can be good and wise and happy without having ever heard of Plato or Spinoza. But — there is an important ‘but’ that I will come back to later.

In fact philosophy is very much akin to a disease. If you are infected with the germ you will philosophize, if not, you can spend a lifetime studying and scrutinizing the works of the greatest

philosophers without becoming a philosopher.

To be a philosopher is to have a questioning mind, to be plagued with an irresistible urge to know, an unquenchable thirst for understanding. But here we should stop to note a crucial distinction depicted by Plato in the *Republic* (475e): Not all ‘knowledge’ is grist for the philosophical mill. A born scientist is also invincibly impelled by the urge to know but – to put it shortly, almost enigmatically – while the scientist’s questions are ‘How?’ questions, the philosopher’s questions are ‘Why?’ questions. This is the distinction drawn by Socrates in the ‘autobiographical’ passage in the *Phaedo* (95e-102a) between investigation into things (*en ergois*) and investigation into ideas (*en logois*). For this reason, to preclude confusion and misunderstanding, I prefer to say that while science is

concerned with knowledge, philosophy is concerned with understanding. I have been harping on this in all my writings from my first book, *Let Us Philosophize*, to my latest, *Creative Eternity: A Metaphysical Myth*.

I come back to the ‘but’ I left hanging in the first paragraph above. I said that a human being can be good and wise and happy without philosophy. But such a person would somehow be immature, incomplete. There is in us an urge to understand why we are here, what the meaning, the purpose, of life is; there is in us a thirst to belong to the All, to be one with the Whole. The *Upanishads*, Lao-tzu’s *Tao Te Ching*, the quests of Xenophanes, Heraclitus, Parmenides, all sought to satisfy that thirst, and they all sought the living water to ease that thirst in the depths of the human soul (mind). Without responding to that thirst in us we remain fragmented,

alienated in the world, lost in the dark mazes of a universe bereft of meaning.

Must all people then study philosophy to be mature and whole human beings.?

We know that many highly intelligent persons have no stomach for philosophy. Plato knew that only a limited portion of humans can philosophize. Must the majority of humans then always remain fragmented and immature? No. Philosophers endowed with the capability for abstract thinking philosophize. Their insights are disseminated by poets and artists — in fiction, drama, the cinema, the plastic arts, and not least in music. In a wholesome culture, where all levels and all aspects of civil and practical life are informed with philosophical insights all humans can live wisely, virtuously, and happily,

That is the hope and the dream for a sane, happy humanity. But sadly, how

far, how very very far, we are from that hope, that dream in our present world drenched in violence, conflict, and animosity — driven by ignorance and greed to the dark precipice of final annihilation.

December 1, 2016

THE METAPHYSICAL ANSWER TO ZENO'S PARADOXES

Ever since Zeno of Elea proposed his famous paradoxes scholars have been trying to find logical or (lately) mathematical solutions or resolutions for these paradoxes. All attempts in this direction are futile since they ignore Zeno's purpose, which was to defend Parmenides's doctrine of the One against the common pluralist or 'realist' view of things.

The pluralists thought Parmenides' denial of multiplicity was contradicted by the actual existence of things in space and time. Zeno's paradoxes were

intended to show the inherent contradictoriness of the notions of space and time. Unfortunayely, this is a lesson lost even on the erudite of our own day who find it hard to acknowledge that space and time are conceptual fictions, useful fictions, necessary for dealing with our fragmented world, but fictions nevertheless.

In nature there is no space, there is no time, there are no things. Plato said that you cannot say of any 'thing' in the actual world 'it is this' or 'it is such', for before you say it, it has ceased to be what ii was. Again Plato said the real is nohing but activity (*dunamis*) (*Sophist*, 247e). Nature is a total flux as Heraclitus saw, a perpetually ongoing single process as Whitehead would say. Absolutely, no 'thing' is separate or separable from the Whole; relatively, a thing has as much actuality as it is a transient whole within the perpetual Whole, in other words, in as much as it

is an 'event' (to resort again to Whitehead).

Watch a cat preparing to jump to a high spot, say the top of a wall. For a while, a second or two, she fixes her sight on the spot to be reached. Certainly in that second or two the intelligence inherent in her whole being determines the correct thrust needed. If it is more than is correct she would fly over the wall and fall on the other side; if it is less than is correct she would knock against the wall and fall down. The sighting, the thrust, the jump, the target are inseparable aspects of one act, one whole. The whole is the real and only what is whole has a share in reality. In conceptual thinking (a thing apparently peculiar to human beings) we break up the whole into distinct elements, dimensions, stages, etc. We create abstractions. We err when we take our abstractions for final, independent,

actual things, and then we fall into endless quandaries.

The logical and mathematical resolutions of Zeno's paradoxes, to rescue the fictions of space and time create other fictions, which in turn may prove useful for certain theoretical and practical purposes, but which cannot remedy the intrinsic contradictoriness of the notions of space and time. The only cogent answer to Zeno's paradoxes is the metaphysical answer, and our metaphysical answer amounts to conceding the validity of Zeno's refutation of pluralism as a philosophical standpoint.

December 3, 2016

NIETZSCHE ON PHILOSOPHY AND TRUTH

A preliminary confession: When I thought of writing this paper it was my intention to comment on Part I of Nietzsche's Beyond Good and Evil to highlight the agreement between Nietzsche's views and mine on the nature of philosophical thinking and on truth but I soon found out that, since there are profound differences between our overall philosophical positions, even when the superficial agreement in our views is marked, our grounds for those seemingly concordant views are widely different, and to represent our

agreement as identity would be a falsification. I realized that the accord between Nietzsche's views and mine is much more complex than I had previously thought. Thus instead of commenting on Nietzsche's text I found myself tracking a parallel path, mostly giving my own views on the problems triggered by the text. I give my notes as I wrote them down while reading with minimal editing. The whole of section (I) below was written while I was reading Rolf-Peter Horstmann's ample Introduction and before I delved into Nietzsche's text; consequently this section reflect my original intention.

I

I venture to say that of all modern philosophers it was Nietzsche who divined the true nature of philosophical thinking. He was the only one who clearly understood that philosophy is

not about ‘truth’, not about ‘what is the case’ in the natural world, not about any objective knowledge. Next to Socrates-Plato he was the philosopher who plainly saw that philosophy is wholly concerned with what we are and what we should be. Like Socrates he was in the first place and in the truest sense a prophet. In *Also Sprach Zarathustra* he delivered his message; in *Jenseits von Gut und Böse* he gave his theoretical underpinning of the message: It is significant that he subtitled it “Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future”. I am now re-reading this latter work and will try to develop and highlight what I have said in these lines. I will concentrate mainly on Part I since in this paper I am not dealing with Nietzsche’s philosophy as a whole but only with his conception of philosophical thinking. (I am using the English translation, edited by Rolf-Peter Horstmann and Judith Norman, translated by Judith Norman,

Cambridge Texts in the History of Philosophy, 2002. All quotations below are from this version; all emphases are in the original.)

Those who failed to understand Nietzsche's approach to philosophizing – radically opposed to mainline academic convictions – accused him of irrationality and of advancing nonsensical proclamations. They could not see that it was his merit and his strength that he saw through the error that marred all philosophical works from the earliest times down to the awesome Hegel (and continues to mar philosophical endeavours to the present day). Nietzsche saw what only Socrates clearly saw, what even Plato falteringly grasped, and what Kant only half glimpsed, namely, that philosophy has nothing to do with establishing facts nor has it anything to do with attaining apodeictic inferential truths. It is the delusion that philosophy is concerned

with objective knowledge or with logically demonstrable truths that has made philosophy the butt of Hume's ridicule and the source of Wittgenstein's despair. People found and still find it hard to grasp this because they fail to free themselves from the false view perpetrated by the learned from Aristotle to the present day. Lau-Tzu and the ancient sages of India would have understood Nietzsche better. I am wrestling against the same failure of understanding. Philosophical statements, like poetic visions, are not meant to be true but to be meaningful, to intimate ineffable insights mythically. (See "Philosophy as Prophecy" , *The Sphinx and the Phoenix*, 2009, and most recently *Eternity and Freedom*.)

On the basis of the conception of the nature of philosophical thinking I attribute to Nietzsche and which I myself advocate, we should not expect

argument to have a role, except marginally, in his works. Argument in philosophy, as I have repeatedly stated in my writings, has only an ancillary role to help in exposition and elucidation, not to prove or to convince. In the *Phaedo*, the most argumentative of Plato's works (in the *Parmenides* the demonstrations demonstrate the futility of demonstration), all the arguments are confessed to be inconclusive. The philosophical substance of the *Phaedo* is in the ideal of the philosophical life; in the notion of the intelligible forms as the source of all understanding; in the vision of the divinity (eternity) of the soul; and in the conception of philosophy as wholly concerned with the intelligible realm, not with the world of things. The *Phaedo*, like the *Parmenides*, has been a closed book to the erudite. Nietzsche's *Beyond Good and Evil* has met with the same fate.

There are those who are shocked by Nietzsche's views on truth, namely (1) that there is no absolute truth; and (2) that so-called truths are essentially fictions. I have been, independently of Nietzsche, asserting both these views throughout my writings. These views are not paradoxical. Those who find them hard to grasp simply cannot free themselves from conventional beliefs and from the conventions of language. Let me try to elucidate this.

What truths are we speaking of when we say there are no absolute truths? Certainly not the ideal of Truth that all thinkers, all poets, all artists, and all individuals of goodwill aspire to as a goal constantly to be approached but never to be actualized. The truths we say can never be absolutely true are statements, propositions, judgments formulated in determinate thought and language. By the very nature of thought and language there can be no complete

accuracy or certainty or fixity in these. I have written repeatedly and extensively on this and obviously I cannot repeat here what I have expounded in many books and essays.

The second view, that all our truths are fictions is of the nature of a corollary to the first. All of our most precise sciences involve unexplained and unexplainable concepts. Mathematics and logic give us the illusion of correctness and certainty, qualities that they display only as long as they are empty artificial forms. As soon as they are contaminated with any actual content they are infected with the imperfection of all actual existence. Of this too I have written repeatedly and extensively and have no desire to expand on it here. (See “Why $2+1=3$ is nonsense” in *Plato’s Universe of Discourse*, 2015.)

(In the above two paragraphs I have been speaking for myself. I believe that Nietzsche's position agrees basically with mine but I am not confident that Nietzsche would endorse my exposition.)

II

Nietzsche's *Beyond Good and Evil* is subtitled "Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future". Thus we should expect that book to show Nietzsche's conception of philosophy. In this paper I am not concerned with the whole of Nietzsche's conception of philosophy but mainly with the views advanced in Part I, "On the Prejudices of Philosophers", which are much akin to views I have been putting forward in all my writings concerning the nature of philosophical thinking and concerning the notion of truth.

Already in the opening lines of the whimsical preface we find Nietzsche mocking the dogmatic philosophers for failing to understand the womanly 'truth'. It is odd that Nietzsche does not give Kant credit for combating dogmatic metaphysics. When Nietzsche goes on to depict what he sees as the cornerstone of dogmatic edifices I am no longer with him but this is not the place to go into that: it deserves separate treatment. Indeed Nietzsche's misunderstanding of Plato and of Kant deserves an extensive answer.

The ambiguity of words is a vicious trap for thinkers. The ambiguity of the words 'truth' and 'truthfulness' is responsible for much confusion and error in philosophical thinking. The truth that a philosopher seeks, if we are to name it truth, has nothing to do with the truth that an empirical scientist seeks. Hence I say that a philosopher seeks understanding or intelligibility,

not truth. This is consistent with my holding, with Socrates, that philosophy is not concerned with how things are in the external (natural, phenomenal) world. Philosophy is solely concerned with the intrinsic coherence of the thoughts in our minds. The intelligibility of a philosophical vision is its reality. To live in intelligible visions, in intrinsically coherent myths, is to live on the plane of metaphysical reality. That is the total sum of philosophy. It is because philosophers have for long erroneously thought they were required to reach the same kind of truth as the scientists that philosophy has been exposed to suspicion and mockery.

In §4 Nietzsche says that “the falsest judgments (which include synthetic judgments *a priori*) are the most indispensable to us”. In what sense are synthetic *a priori* judgments ‘false’ and in what sense are they

indispensable to us? I believe these two questions elude our academic philosophers. (1) These judgments cannot, strictly speaking, be 'true' because they can neither be logically justified nor empirically verified. They are what I call creative propositions, pure creations of the mind. (2) They are most important to us because, together with synthetic *a posteriori* judgments, they are the whole content of our positive meaningful thought. Analytic *a priori* judgments are empty. (They say nothing: Wittgenstein.) Synthetic *a posteriori* judgments without the pure creations of the mind are dumb or, more truly said, are impossible. This is Kant's transcendental system in a nutshell. With Kant and with Plato I maintain that mathematical propositions are synthetic *a priori*. They are only analytic 'after the fact' so to speak. Thus Nietzsche is justified in saying that "without constant falsification of

the world through numbers, people could not live” (§4). As I have been affirming in all my works, we, as human beings, live, strictly speaking, in a world of our own creation. Nietzsche chooses to put it paradoxically: “a renunciation of false judgments would be a renunciation of life, a negation of life”. That is part of his transvaluation of all values.

I see that I had much exaggerated the area of agreement between Nietzsche’s views and mine. Nietzsche’s mockery of both Kant and Spinoza (§5) is cruel. I have radically criticized the theoretical structure of both these great minds but I find Nietzsche’s castigation as unperceptive as it is unjust. . Spinoza and Kant were not deceptors but were themselves deluded and harmed themselves, burying their essential insights under heaps of bric-a-brac. Nietzsche shows greater perception when he characterizes “every great

philosophy” as “a confession of faith on the part of its author” (§6), though he goes on to give this true insight a sinister dressing.

Perhaps it was only his debunking of the fetish of philosophical ‘truth’ and ‘certainty’ that gave me my deluded enthusiasm for Nietzsche’s views on philosophy and truth. My admiration of his aphoristic, poetic, prophetic style is a thing apart. The greatest merit of Nietzsche as a thinker is that, by shockingly contradicting common beliefs and common evaluations, he disturbs the stagnation of our received convictions and jolts us into rethinking our assumptions and presuppositions.

In the long §11 Nietzsche goes back to Kant and to German philosophy following Kant with the habitual mixture of perception, malice, and misunderstanding. It is true that the answer given by Kant to the question

“How are synthetic judgments *a priori* possible?” is no answer. It is enough glory to Kant that he drew attention to the fundamental role of synthetic *a priori* judgments in human knowledge. The question is unanswerable because this ‘faculty’ is part of the mystery of the reality of the mind and the creativity of the mind. Schelling’s designating it as “intellectual intuition” while still providing no answer is yet appropriate. The merit of Plato’s myth of reminiscence is that it is not an explanation but an affirmation of the creativity of the mind as the source of all intelligibility and all understanding. Without this and without acknowledging the reality of synthetic *a priori* judgments we are left with Locke’s passive receptor of impressions that cannot yield any knowledge or any understanding; without this we are reduced to the inanities of empiricist

reductionism and the wild-goose chase of neuroscientists.

In §13 Nietzsche introduces his doctrine of “will to power”: he says, “Life itself is will to power”. But does not this view involve an unnecessary restriction?

Why ‘to power’? Why not simply say that life is will as Schopenhauer said the world is will? Nietzsche does not accept self-preservation as “the cardinal drive of an organic being”. He says, “Above all, a living thing wants to *discharge* its strength.” Fair enough. A living thing wants to pour out its energy: life itself is outflowing energy; let us say it is ‘power’, but not necessarily power over other than itself; this is only a derivative and, we may say, pathological variation. Plato said that all things are nothing but *dunamis* (power, energy). I say that reality (let us forget about ‘things, ceding them to empirical science) is ultimately nothing but activity, creative activity, sheer creativity. And I do not

say that this view is true or rationalistically justifiable, let alone empirically verifiable: I say this is how the world makes sense to me, or as I usually put it, it is the only way I find the world intelligible.

§14 shows how far more perceptive Nietzsche was than the academics of his time and of our time, both scientists and philosophers. I cannot refrain from quoting the opening lines: “Now it is beginning to dawn on maybe five or six brains that physics too is only an interpretation of the world (according to ourselves! if I may say so) and *not* an explanation of the world.” This should have been plain from Kant’s ‘Copernican revolution’, but despite Kant and Nietzsche and Wittgenstein scientists and philosophers still speak of scientific theories as ‘explaining’ the world. — But Nietzsche for all his perceptiveness persists in distorting views that are not to his taste, not only

Plato's but also Schopenhauer's with whom he has much affinity.

Nietzsche asserts that “‘immediate certainty,’ like ‘absolute knowledge’ and ‘the thing in itself’ contains a *contradiction in adjecto*” (§16). While this is true in a restricted sense, we cannot deny that immediacy is certainty and there is no certainty other than the certainty of immediacy. While “I am I”, like Descartes’s “I think”, can be riddled with contradictions, my certainty of my being is assured, though it cannot be expressed in any ‘absolutely true’ formulation of thought or language. Again, the notion of ‘the thing in itself’ is problematic when applied to external things, but we have the secure source and model of the notion in our subjective awareness of our subjectivity, our awareness of our creative will.

Nietzsche's insights regularly come with a twist. In §17 speaking of the "superstitions of the logicians" he says that "a thought comes when 'it' wants, and not when 'I' want". It all depends of course on what we mean by 'I'. The exteriorization of the 'I' breeds multitudinous errors. We do not think of what we think; we think what we think. Thought, which is a species of will, has the essential spontaneity of will. Watch two persons engaged in discussion. A person does not think what to say; it is a falsification even to say that a person thinks. The thought flows out in speech. Thus far Nietzsche's "a thought comes when 'it' wants" is justified. Where does it flow from? From the reality of the person, from the creative mind that is our inner reality. This is the way I find the mystery of knowledge, understanding, thought, intelligible.

Nietzsche penetratingly says that even the 'it' in 'it thinks' "contains an

interpretation of the process, and does not belong to the process itself” (§17). This points to the falsity inherent in all determinate thought, a lesson that Plato’s spells out most clearly but which the erudite still find hard to grasp.

Nietzsche repeatedly asserts the absurdity of the *causa sui* concept. Strictly speaking of course it is nonsensical. But as used by Spinoza it has a valid meaning. It refers to that which has no cause outside itself. In this sense it is an inescapable fundamental notion, since ultimately Reality (Being) must be thought of as having no external cause. And since all things in the world are interdependent and are therefore determined by what is other than they are, Spinoza consistently maintains that the *causa sui* in this special sense must be the one Substance. It is the same with ‘free will’ which Nietzsche ties up with the *causa*

sui. Since there is becoming, since things do happen in the world, what is ultimately the ‘cause’ of becoming? What is the primal origin of becoming? To my mind, the only intelligible origin of all being and all becoming is Will. That primal Will cannot be anything but free and creative. And our will is part of that Will.

Nietzsche then moves to ridicule the “mechanistic stupidity which would have the cause push and shove until it ‘effects’ something” (§21). He goes on to say that “we should use ‘cause’ and ‘effect’ only as pure *concepts*, which is to say as conventional fictions for the purpose of description and communication, *not* explanation”. There I agree with him entirely. Indeed I have been saying this repeatedly and emphatically but both scientists and philosophers will not listen. Nietzsche continues: “*We* are the ones who invented causation, succession, for-

each-other, relativity, ... this is the way we have always done things, namely *mythologically*.” I believe it was these lines more than anything else that had previously made me think there was complete congruity between Nietzsche’s views and mine regarding philosophical thinking and truth:

December 10, 2016

KNOWING THE FUTURE

The question “Can we know the future?” has three distinct aspects which I designate (1) the prophetic; (2) the logical; (3) the scientific.

THE PROPHETIC ASPECT

The future has lured humans ever since they created the concept of time and the daughter concepts past, present, and future. We need not go into the psychology of wanting to know the future: Every one of us knows the experience of wondering what the morrow will bring, with trepidation, hope, anxiety, perplexity, curiosity. In

olden times people resorted – and to some extent still do – to soothsayers, prophets, necromancers, etc., to foretell the future. Basically this involves the same absurdity inherent in the now ‘respectable’ notion of time travel.

Time is a creation of the human mind. In the natural world there is no time. As in the case of the notion of infinity, there is not and there cannot be any actual thing corresponding to the notion. Newton believed in absolute time; Leibniz ridiculed the notion; but even for Newton it was no more than a working fiction on par with the ‘force of gravitation’ which Newton confessed he had no inkling what it might be.

The past no longer exists; the future does not exist at present. To foresee the future is to see what is not; to travel to the future is to travel to what is not. Historians do not go back to the past to discover what happened: they interpret

extant marks and reconstruct in the present a plausible picture of what might have been. In the same way when we recall a dream we had in sleep we do not sleep back and return to the dream; we reconstruct the dream. Thus I maintain that knowing the future in the manner of soothsayers and diviners and the idea of travelling to the future (or to the past) involve the same absurdity of actualizing what cannot be actual.

THE LOGICAL ASPECT

What I called the second aspect of the problem does not in fact relate to whether we can know the future but to the logical status of statements relating to the future. In logic the principle of the excluded middle states that a judgment is either true or its negation is true. So it looks as if we are faced with a dilemma when we say for instance “It will rain tomorrow”. Is this statement

true? If not, is the statement “It will not rain tomorrow” true? Aristotle had the answer long ago. Statements about the future are neither true nor false. They are not logical judgments. Like wishes, prayers, and commands they do not report ‘what is the case’ – these alone are either true or false – but express affects or states of emotion.

THE SCIENTIFIC ASPECT

Modern science queerly wedded Empiricism to Rationalism. In principle Empiricism should acknowledge no certainty. But the outstanding successes of science and technology from the seventeenth century onwards made it easy for both scientists and philosophers to embrace the rationalistic notion of causal necessity which oddly imports mathematical certainty into the empirical arena. Mathematical certainty is only a consequence of mathematics

being an artificial formal construction invented by the human mind. When we created the number series we made 4 equal to 2 and 2.

Around the turn of the nineteenth century Laplace (1749-1827), in *A Philosophical Essay on Probabilities*, confidently declared:

“We ought to regard the present state of the universe as the effect of its antecedent state and as the cause of the state that is to follow. An intelligence knowing all the forces acting in nature at a given instant, as well as the momentary positions of all things in the universe, would be able to comprehend in one single formula the motions of the largest bodies as well as the lightest atoms in the world, provided that its intellect were sufficiently powerful to subject all data to analysis; to it nothing would be uncertain, the future as well as the past would be present to its eyes.”

This has since been held as an unquestionable creed among scientists in general and many philosophers. Laplace's doctrine is clearly based on the assumption that "the present state of the universe (is) the effect of its antecedent state and (is) the cause of the state that is to follow". But do we really know what a cause is? Do we understand how one state of affairs causes another? All that experience teaches us is, as Hume said, that one thing follows another. The concept of cause – as Kant said and as Plato knew long before Kant – is produced by the mind to lend coherence and intelligibility to what dumb experience presents us with.

We know two kinds of causality. There is the causality of free will, our spontaneous acts and thoughts. This is a creative causality where the antecedents do not determine or explain the consequents. This we know

immediately in ourselves and it is only because we are blinded by the dazzling practical achievements of science that we belie our immediate awareness and try to constrain our free thoughts and deeds into the model of 'natural causation'. What do we know of this natural causation? We know that a seed given soil and moisture and sunshine develops into a plant that produces flower and fruit. We can describe the process to whatever degree of comprehensiveness and accuracy but we only fool ourselves if we think that we understand how that comes about.

To my mind nature is creative as all being is creative. But this is a philosophical vision that I do not foist on science, especially as I insist in principle on keeping philosophy and science strictly apart. Confining ourselves to the empirical sphere, do we find it conceivable that all the variety and change in the natural world could

have come about had there been no origination in nature? Darwin taught us about the origin of species. Now a new species is not reproduced mechanically from its predecessor but comes out of the interaction of many factors and the product is something new. So if nature is not only in flux as Heraclitus said but is always bringing in what is new, this gives further support to what we should have known already: that all so-called laws of nature are approximations describing observed regularities. A scientific law by its nature must generalize. A scientific law has the inbuilt proviso “other things being constant”, but other things in the universe are never constant. The most sophisticated astrophysical calculations must be based on the state of the universe this instant, but this instant is a fiction, a chimera that you can never catch. Einstein wisely said: “As far as the laws of mathematics refer to reality,

they are not certain, as far as they are certain, they do not refer to reality.”

The upshot of all this is that causal determinism is a fiction, a good working fiction that may have given scientists courage to make wide strides in their various fields, but a fiction nevertheless. The scientific prediction of the future is, under the best circumstances, approximate, probabilistic, and never absolutely certain.

Finally a confession. Throughout all of this I have had an axe to grind. I wanted to point out a moral. It is foolish to cast doubt on the freedom and the creativity of the will on the ground of the presumed incompatibility between freedom and causal determinism. Poor Kant needlessly huffed and puffed to rescue moral freedom because the rationalism underlying his critical

system made it hard for him to reject
the fiction of causal determinism.

December 18, 20`6

JUSTIFYING MORALITY

Every animal in its life and death lives out its nature, its innate character, and fulfills its destiny. Basically this is true of the human animal. But in the case of human beings there is a complication, for human beings, in addition to their animal nature, have an acquired character. We owe that to the power of reflection, of conceptual thinking, in virtue of which we can have non-natural aims and purposes, values and ideals, fears and hopes and ambitions. This brings about a plane of being inaccessible, as far as we know, to our animal kin.

Thus human beings, over and above their animal nature, have what we may call an over-nature. A human individual, however unsophisticated, simple, and naïve, necessarily must have a set of values, aims, and purposes that determine her or his special character. Positively or negatively, an individual lives out that special character, that over-nature, constituted by her or his special set of evaluations, aims, and purposes.

Accordingly, a human being willy-nilly must have a morality and will live in conformity with that morality and will die for that morality if need be. A Hulagu Khan or a Buddha, a serial-killer or a saint, all live out their special morality and none of them can convince the others of the error of their ways. Socrates was ridiculed by Callicles (*Gorgias*) and by Thrasymachus (*Republic*) and all his arguments could not convince either of them that it is

never right to harm another and that to suffer injustice is to be preferred to committing injustice.

Thus far we have been on the plane of nature even with the addition of the over-nature peculiar to humans thanks to their power of conceptual thinking. But just as conceptual thinking gives us a plane of being on which we live our characteristically human life, creative thinking brings about another distinct plane of being, the plane of metaphysical or spiritual reality. Plato in the *Phaedo* portrays the philosophical life, life on the plane of spiritual reality. It is not the numerous halting arguments for personal immortality that give the true message and meaning of the *Phaedo*, but the ideal of the philosophical life and the notion of the divinity (eternity) of the soul. (The argument in the *Phaedrus* for the eternity of the soul deserves special treatment.) When Socrates in the

Phaedo ends by speaking of adorning the soul “in her own proper jewels, which are temperance, and justice, and courage, and nobility” (Jowett) he is speaking of life on the spiritual plane.

A person who has elected to live on the spiritual plane sees that as her or his true inner being; she or he will live in eternity for the duration of her or his life and will readily die rather than be untrue to that inner reality — as Socrates died, as Giordano Bruno died.

Shelley ends his *Prometheus Unbound* with prophetic words which portray life on the plane of spiritual eternity:

To suffer woes which Hope thinks infinite;
To forgive wrongs darker than death or
night;
To defy Power, which seems omnipotent;
To love, and bear; to hope till Hope creates
From its own wreck the thing it
contemplates;
Neither to change, nor falter, nor repent;
This, like thy glory, Titan, is to be

Good, great and joyous, beautiful and free;
This is alone Life, Joy, Empire, and Victory.

This is the final justification of morality, but it is a justification that will cut no ice with those who have not elected that kind of life for themselves. Hence it is not by moralizing or arguing or inculcation that we teach morality but by firing the creative imagination. The best teachers of morality are not preachers but poets and artists. The best examples of moral teaching are the myths of Plato, the parables of Jesus.

December 23, 2016

SCIENCE DEHUMANIZING
HUMANITY

Biologists will find everything human rooted in evolution. We owe everything to evolution: our inclinations, our desires, our emotions, our likes and dislikes, our mental attitudes, our moral values, down to our basic metaphysical notions.

All right. Evolution fashioned us. But what is evolution? It is not an external force, a foreign agency, a something working on us from the outside.

Evolution is the process of us becoming what we have become. We have become what we have become by virtue of the creative principle – better said, the creativity – inherent in us as in all reality. Everything in us is a gift of nature but that nature is our nature,

Scientists are in error not in what they affirm but in what they imply. The creation myth of the monotheistic religions dehumanized us by making us the product of a transcendent deity.

Empirical scientists are dehumanizing us by making us the product of objective 'natural' (physical, chemical, biological) forces.

In more than one sense, and on more than one level, human beings are makers of themselves. On the conceptual plane, ideas, ideals, and values created by the human mind constitute the life proper to human beings. On the highest plane, spontaneous thought and spontaneous deeds constitute the domain of freedom. The creations of genius in poetry, music, art, philosophy, constitute the spiritual heritage of humanity.

December 29, 2016

THE PHILOSOPHICAL ESSAY

Scholarly dissertations by academic philosophers no doubt have their use, but they add nothing to the genuine philosophical heritage; for philosophy is the free exploration of ideas.

The free exploration of ideas does not yield objective knowledge, nor does it arrive at apodeictic or demonstrable truth. The first end of philosophical thinking is to remove confusions and obscurities of ideas to enjoy clearer, more coherent, thinking. At a higher level, philosophical thinking creates notions that infuse order and meaning into what was a chaos.

Socrates, discussing the idea of ‘cause’ (*aitia*) in the *Phaedo*, declares himself unsatisfied with the naïve idea that a man grows when by nourishment flesh is added to flesh, bone to bone, and so on. Now this naïve idea is of the selfsame character as what empirical science accepts as an instance of causation and we find it difficult to appreciate Socrates’ dissatisfaction and find it more difficult to see his point when he says that it is the idea Growth that makes the growing of the man understandable.

Socrates of course did not invent the idea of growth. The idea was created by the human mind long ago. People saw a plant or an animal small, then saw it bigger, then saw it bigger still, and that was a baffling mystery; then a woman or man with a creative mind said, “We will call that Growth.” This gathered the disparate appearances of the plant or animal in a whole, gave

them unity, and intelligibility. This did not explain the mystery. Nor do the scientist's elaborate descriptions of the process explain the mystery. The idea attires the chaos in a garb that makes it eligible for membership in our intelligible realm. That is the beginning and end of all understanding. For in truth we know nothing but thanks to the creativity of the mind we create for ourselves an intelligible world of our own,

But I have strayed far away from what I had in mind when I began this essay. Let me put it crudely. Philosophy proper being free exploration of ideas, the exemplary medium for philosophical writing is the Platonic dialogue and next to that the free essay. The best writings of original philosophers were essentially free essays not scholarly dissertations. I will only name a few: Descartes, Hume, Schopenhauer, Santayana. Whitehead,

when he found no satisfaction in mathematics, physics, biology, gave his rein to his creative intelligence and produced philosophical essays from *Science and the Modern World* to *Adventures of Ideas*. Kant only harmed himself when he buried his great insights under his cumbrous tectonic structure.

January 2, 2017

THE CERTAINTY DELUSION

Dear Reader: In the following rambling thoughts I may have given way to much foolishness. I am not asking you to take anything of what I say on trust. If I goad you to think things out for yourself, will it have been a waste of time?

In *Let Us Philosophize* (1998, 2008) I wrote:

“Words are treacherous. Words, creatures of the mind, jump at every opportunity to lord it over the mind. There is not a single word that one may use unguardedly. Every word holds out a snare, and one must beware of falling into the snares of words. The mind must

constantly assert its mastery over words by re-thinking, re-creating all its terms, all its formulations. Otherwise it soon finds itself a slave to the creatures it created to sing its hymns of glory. ...”

Despite the rhetorical tone, I meant every word to be taken in complete earnestness. In all my subsequent writings I have emphasized that no determinate formulation of words or thought can be exempt from intrinsic contradictoriness. This is the lesson that Plato meant to convey in the *Parmenides*, a dialogue which scholars, blind to its plain message, have found perplexing. In the first quarter of the twentieth century, logicians, pursuing the dream of Leibniz, developed the ‘perfect’ language of symbolic logic. That has been put to many practical uses, but has a single ‘truth’ in whatever field of knowledge been arrived at by sheer manipulation of logical symbolism? Was not Wittgenstein fully

justified in holding that pure logic says nothing?

The ‘science’ of economics, I am given to understand, has been fully mathematized. If the economies of the most advanced countries in the world are not in complete shambles, can economists honestly claim credit for that? I frame my sentences guardedly in view of my confessed ignorance, but I expect a clear-sighted competent economist could put the point more strongly.

The astounding advance of science and technology in the past four centuries gave rise to the rationalist illusion that there can be absolute certainty in scientific formulations and to the sister delusion that it is possible – at any rate in principle – to predict future natural states with absolute certainty provided we have adequate information about the preceding state. This is the dogma of

causal determinism which was given its classic expression by Pierre Laplace (1749-1827).

The dogma of causal determinism is allied to the illusion that we know what causation is. I maintain that the only causation we know is the causation of our free will. The 'causes' science deals with are descriptions of observed natural processes and interpretations of observed regularities in nature. Nature has well-settled habits and these enable us to make serviceable predictions.

These predictions, including the most precise scientific predictions, are approximations that can never be absolutely certain or absolutely accurate. The sun will not rise tomorrow if our galaxy collides with another galaxy. The most accurate calculation of the earth's orbit round the sun cannot be absolutely accurate if only because the mass of the sun is constantly changing.

To remain with the sun: the most prominent regularity observed by humans in nature is that the sun rises every morning and goes down at the end of the day. Humans sought to interpret that. They saw the sun as a god that benevolently comes up every morning to give light and warmth to all living things. This ‘explained’ the movement of the sun as well as any other interpretation. Ptolemy in the second century of our era gave an intricate astronomical interpretation of the planetary movements that served for centuries. Copernicus gave another that we find fits the observed phenomena better but which – I affirm bluntly – explains nothing. Nor did Newton explain anything: he gave a formula that enables us to calculate the movements of bodies to a practically satisfactory degree of accuracy. He said that what makes bodies move that way is something he called the force of

gravitation, but he confessed he did not know what that force might be. Einstein did away with that force and attributed the movement to a curvature in space' I venture to say that that is no better an explanation than the god Ra or the god Apollo. What Einstein contributed was new mathematical formulations yielding more satisfactory calculations. It may be apposite here to quote an insightful statement of Einstein's that I have quoted several times before: "As far as the laws of mathematics refer to reality, they are not certain, as far as they are certain, they do not refer to reality."

Since I have already stuck my neck out, I will permit myself another roguery. Since there is no absolute space (*pace* Newton) and since the universe has no fixed centre, I suppose a god standing outside the universe would wink and see the earth orbiting the sun, then wink again and see the sun orbiting the earth, and he would wisely know that both

views are equally right and equally wrong.

January 9, 2017

ETHICS AND PHILOSOPHY

Can there be a philosophical ethics? To my mind the answer to this is: Only the ethics of the philosophical life is philosophically defensible. If, with Plato, you hold that a life of philosophizing is the best life for a human being, then and only then you can consistently uphold the priority and superiority of contemplation and meditation to a life of pleasure or

adventure or power or personal glory. Any of these latter alternatives can serve as the rational basis of a coherent and consistent morality.

Before you can rationally defend any morality you have to determine the values you elect to maintain. Is there any rational ground for preferring, say, benevolence to malevolence? There may be utilitarian arguments for the long-term advantage of doing good to others. These do not constitute a moral stance any more than the belief that the gods commanded it and will reward those who comply and punish those who don't.

Kant said that the only absolutely good thing is a good will. I see that as a version of Socrates' belief that the whole worth and good of a human being resides in a healthy soul. For both Socrates and Kant that provides the rational ground for morality but neither

of them grounds that first ground rationally.

Apart from the ideal of philosophical life, does philosophy give any reason for being good? Before it can do that it has to determine what it is to be good. No pure logic, no 'pure reason', can do that.

Metaphysics – and I may seem here to contradict what I have been saying above – can only support morality when it sees goodness and intelligence and freedom as aspects of ultimate reality as Plato and as Spinoza did and as I do in my philosophy of Creative Eternity. But such metaphysics itself cannot be rationally grounded. It is a vision that appeals to us aesthetically.

Ultimately the moral sense is of the nature of the aesthetic sense. To be morally good is to have the aptitude for the sense of the good life, the holy life. That sense is nurtured and developed by

love, by beauty, by imaginative works of art, poetry, and literature.

Perhaps we are all born with the seed of that sense of goodness, for life itself is essentially a power of affirmation, of giving. But as we grow up innumerable negative influences tend to obliterate and smother that sense.

To go back to the question we began with: Can there be a philosophical ethics? A philosophy like Plato's that is sheer poetry nourishes the moral sense (when it is not mutilated by erudite ignorance), but no theoretical reasoning can prove that to suffer injury is better than to commit injury, as Socrates maintained.

(In the above I have not been concerned with the problems of applied ethics which, it seems, have recently been the prime object of ethical discussion.)

January 16, 2017

REFLECTIONS ON LOGIC

What is logic? As I see it, logic – I speak first of traditional, Aristotelian logic – is an empirical science. Aristotle did not lay down laws for thought: he observed normal thought, extracted regular patterns in normal thought, then systematized and formulated those patterns in ‘laws’ just as physicists observe and describe regularities in nature and name them ‘laws’. In other words, thought naturally has inbred habits and settled channels which Logic describes and systematizes. As a science it has the same relation to philosophy as other sciences. While philosophical thinking naturally

operates logically, it can do without Logic.

No one needs Logic to think ‘correctly’. All one needs is, first, to be honest with oneself, and secondly to see to it that one’s ideas are in order and not muddled. Little children and primitive peoples think properly and effectively. This is not to denigrate the science of Logic: it is good as all natural science is good; but it is not necessary for philosophy nor is it part of philosophy proper.

Thus far I have been speaking of traditional, Aristotelian, Logic. The development of mathematical or symbolic logic in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries is more properly to be seen as taking mathematics – rather than logic – to a higher plane of abstraction. It created a language by means of which propositions and terms are represented by highly abstract

symbols rendering it possible to make complex calculations more easily and securely in the field of physical abstractions. But it is sheer folly to think that symbolic logic can be of any use in solving practical life-problems or in deciding moral or philosophical questions. It is the nature of abstraction to abstract from – that is, to drop – the particularities of the particular, and that is just what we have to consider in dealing with practical problems.

Neither the old Logic nor the new Symbolic Logic (which it is a travesty to call Logic at all) in itself and by itself can yield new knowledge or truth.

Neither Newton nor Einstein arrived at their theories by logical deduction or by calculation. Each of them had a creative idea out of which he derived a formula for making calculations. Logic – old or new – is barren; left to itself it goes on reproducing its empty formations.

The creators of logical symbolism sought to escape the fluidity and ambiguity of ordinary language. To gain precision and accuracy they dropped the nuances and rough edges of common-language words. The more fit the artificial language became for special purposes the more inadequate it became to reflect the fluidity and interrelatedness of life and nature. The dream of making pure logic resolve moral perplexities – as Leibniz dreamed – is a vain dream.

Kant saw that pure reason yields no knowledge about the natural world. Wittgenstein saw that pure logic says nothing. In the realm of the object, we question nature and nature speaks to us in enigmas that we interpret variously. In the realm of the subject, we question our own mind, not to reach any knowledge or truth but to enjoy the self-evident luminosity of the reality of the mind.

January 17, 2017

BERGSON, EINSTEIN, AND TIME

I am reading Maria Popova's article on Jimena Canales's *The Physicist and the Philosopher*

<http://press.princeton.edu/titles/10445.html> As is my habit, I will write down

what occurs to me as I read, not basically commenting on the article but expressing marginal thoughts on points discussed, perhaps mostly on Time and on the 'science and philosophy' question.

Hannah Arendt, in the citation heading the article, speaks of "the continuously flowing stream of sheer change" being changed by man "into

time as we know it”. This is very perceptive and perhaps it says it all. In nature, in reality, there is no time: there is the stream of change, the Heraclitian flux.

I think it is too much to speak of the Bergson-Einstein conversation ‘shaping our experience of time’. What changed in the twentieth century was the theoretical approach influenced by the fiction of absolute time. Experienced time was always and continues to be subjective and relative.

“Einstein insisted that only two types of time existed: physical, the kind measured by clocks ...”. Do ‘clocks’ measure time? Can we catch time as an objective ‘what’ to measure? We measure an event in terms of an arbitrarily chosen standard event reduced to an arithmetical unit and we can never reach the absolutely irreducible standard unit. Ask Zeno of

Elea. As in the case of space: you can never have the absolutely irreducible unit measure of space. You cannot take the Euclidean point as a unit for measuring Descartes's *res extensa*, which is an uncatchable faery.

Of course Bergson's duration was and is of no use for science. This underlines the radical difference (that Socrates saw clearly and that I have been harping on in all my writings) between science which interprets objective phenomena in terms of theoretical fictions on the one hand and philosophy which interprets subjective realities in terms of imaginative myths. (If the reader finds this enigmatic I ask her or him to excuse me because this sums up my philosophy, which could not be put in a few words without seeming enigma,)

“The debris of that disagreement became the foundation of our present

ideas about the fabric of existence.”

Fascinating! But as I see it, no interchange between science and philosophy can lead to an ultimate view of the ‘fabric of existence’. As Plato emphasized, the study of outer things can only give us *doxa* (let us here say ‘theory’), while the mind in itself and by itself gives us insight into a reality that can only be intimated poetically in parable, metaphor, and myth. Or as Kant put it, objective science can only deal with phenomena while pure reason is solely concerned with Ideas. There can be no meeting ground between the two. Science has to confess it has nothing to do with ultimate reality and philosophy has to acknowledge that it has nothing to do with factual knowledge or knowledge about the natural world.

It is odd that Einstein, the sanest of modern scientists, and Bergson, with his penetrating intellect, could not see that

their argument was pointless since they were speaking about two different and completely unrelated things — like two people arguing about Venus, one having in mind the planet and the other the goddess. I believe that Whitehead, in whose philosophy the notion of duration had a crucial role, could not be unclear about the difference between subjective and objective time.

We read of Einstein “rattling our understanding of time”. Whose understanding of time? Newton’s or Stephen Hawking’s maybe. But not Sappho’s or Wordsworth’s.

To my mind it is meaningless to oppose physics to metaphysics or rationality to antirationalism. Physics studies objective existents, the world outside us; metaphysics explores our inner reality. Rationalism, to which antirationalism is rightly opposed, claims that reason can explain

everything and, in principle, can foretell what the state of the world will be at any future time; rationality is the demand that we accept nothing that does not satisfy our reason. Of course such sweeping statements as I have made here must be full of pores and replete with embedded contradictions; this is inevitable, but I believe a sympathetic reader will find sense in what I am saying.

The statement that “the universe (and our knowledge of it) could stand just as well without us” is two-pronged. That the universe could stand without us is opposed to subjective idealism which no sane person ever held seriously but only as a theoretical problem. That ‘our knowledge’ of the universe would stand ‘without us’ is inane.

We read: “Each man represented one side of salient, irreconcilable

dichotomies that characterized modernity.” These dichotomies result from scientists trying to answer philosophical problems and philosophers trying to reach objective factual knowledge. All my writings have been directed to resolving this groundless impasse.

January 19, 2017

WHAT IS LIFE?

What is life? Let me begin by stating my position bluntly. I see ultimate reality as living, intelligent, and creative. This position I do not arrive at by reasoning and it cannot be defended by reasoning nor can it be refuted by reasoning. It is simply the view in terms of which I can find the world intelligible.

Being, life, mind, becoming, freedom (creativity) are ultimate irreducible mysteries. Science searching empirically for the origin of life or mind or becoming will only delve infinitely into beginnings that have further

beginnings. Philosophy, employing pure reason, when sane and wise, stands in reverential awe before these mysteries and pays homage to them by inventing myths to intimate their ineffable reality.

Such is our knowledge for in truth we know nothing. And let no one jump eristically at this statement describing it as a paradox or a self-contradiction, for our knowledge of our ignorance (knowing that we are ignorant) is not knowledge of something objective but is our immediate awareness of our limitation. The apparent paradox is only an indication and a consequence of the ineluctable imperfection of language and of logic as well.

What is the use of science and of philosophy then? Science gives us useful practical knowledge (please don't jump at the word) about things and the ways of things, about phenomena as Kant would say. This

know-how knowledge at its most advanced, most astounding, most sophisticated, is humbled by the like knowledge exhibited by a bee, an ant, or by an amoeba.

As to philosophy, philosophy allows us to probe into our inner reality, commune with ultimate realities and with the intelligible realities created by the mind, the realities of love, of beauty, of loyalty and honour. This and only this is understanding. In philosophizing we exercise our intelligence and live our life as intelligent beings.

Does my position imply that all things, animate and those we call inanimate, have life and mind? Yes, but it is in vain that we try to imagine how a rose or a pebble feels. All the efforts of scientists to probe, by whatever ingenious experiments and devices, into the interior life or mind of a fish or bird

or even a primate, are in vain. They yield objective phenomena that can be variously interpreted, including reductionist interpretations which falsely and deceptively parade as explanations. If God wanted to know how a frog feels he has first to become a frog. But as I have put it somewhere, I cannot but think that a butterfly must be as beautiful within as it is without.

January 20, 2017.

TO THINK = TO FALSIFY

Self-Knowledge as example

In Plato's *Charmides* Critias proposes to define 'temperance' (*sôphrosunê*) as self-knowledge and identifies the Delphic *gnôthi sauton* with an injunction to be temperate. Socrates sets out to examine the proposal. At the very outset Socrates introduces the assumption that undermines the examination and dooms it to futility. This is not an unwitting fault on the part of Socrates. The whole of the Socratic elenchus aims at revealing the futility of seeking understanding through

objective dissection of an idea, as I have been affirming in all my writings.

If to be temperate, Socrates says, is to cognize (*gignôskein*) something, then it is knowledge (*epistêmê*) and the knowledge of something. This is the rock on which all the elenctic voyages in search of the ‘what’ of this or that crashed and were wrecked. For the understanding of an idea cannot be found in anything external to the idea but only in the self-evidence of the idea in the immediacy of the intelligence that gave birth to it.

In all the elenctic discourses Socrates leads the discussion to the identification of virtue (or of a specific virtue) with wisdom, intelligence, understanding (*sophia, nous*), or the blanket-term knowledge (*epistêmê*); then he proceeds to inquire: What knowledge, knowledge of what? And it turns out that it is not any particular knowledge. This is the

true goal of the elenchus, to turn the interlocutor's mind within, where all understanding is.

This same rock of dividing the indivisible, of objectifying the subjective, is what wrecked Kant's desperate search for identifying the transcendental unity of apperception. It is what baffled Wittgenstein's attempts to catch the meaning of a word and that tormented him with the chimera of private language.

This nemesis attaching to all thought that dooms it to falsifying all it touches is also the essential *aretê* (power, function) of thought. To think is to break up the one into many, to fragment what is whole. That is the basis of all theoretical knowledge. That serves our practical purposes well but we err gravely when we think we can approach reality or can have any certainty or any definitive truth that way.

Interminable scholarly controversies rage around the theory, say, of Truth or of Justice, not only because Truth is not one thing or Justice one thing, but even when we constrict as much as possible the range of the term we are concerned with, a single, comprehensive, definitive theory is in the nature of things an impossibility. For to theorize is to abstract features or elements of an original totality to be worked into a consistent parallel artificial whole picturing the original. A picture is not the thing pictured and the thing pictured can always be pictured anew and necessarily with a difference.

Similarly, the problem of self-knowledge (not in the psychological or moral sense which is a different matter) has been the subject of much theoretical dispute. All the difficulties arise from the creation of a duality of knower and known. We are trapped by the grammar of a language created for dealing with

outward things. Self-knowledge is simply the mind aware of its reality: its reality is this awareness, this intelligence, this luminosity. For the mind is not a thing, not an entity, but is a perpetual act of intelligent creativity. This is a difficult notion to grasp because it runs counter to our common norms of thought and language but to my mind this alone puts an end to our theoretical quandaries.

Let this suffice for now, but this is a subject I have dealt with repeatedly before and will probably (given the time) revert to again and again.

January 24, 2017

CAN SCIENCE MAKE LIFE BETTER?

The Independent on February 1, 2017, tells us: “Quantum computing breakthrough could help ‘change life completely’, say scientists.” This is followed, in quotes, by: “It is the Holy Grail of science ... we will be able to do certain things we could never even dream of before.”

When has science stopped enabling us “do certain things we could never even dream of before” — from turning a stone into a cutting edge to destroying a city by a single bomb? But has it ever improved the quality of life? More

importantly, has it made us inwardly a worthier kind of being? Have all the achievements of science made us more sensitive to beauty than the flower-painters of ancient China or more aware of the vanity of our dreams than Gautama the Buddha? The hubris of science is blinding us to what is truly real and truly valuable in us.

February 1, 2017

WHAT USE IS PHILOSOPHY?

Some twenty-six centuries of philosophical endeavour show clearly, or should have sufficed for us to see clearly, that the endeavour was completely on a wrong track: (1) it produced not one bit of factual knowledge about the natural world; (2) it established not one irrefutable proposition.

Let me stop for a moment to say why I speak of twenty-six centuries or so. Before that in Egypt, in Babylonia, there was science and mathematics and wisdom; in India, in China, in Persia, there was profound speculation about

the mysteries of Being and Life
couched in metaphor, aphorism, and
paradox. But some twenty-six centuries
ago the audacious Ionians set to reach
answers to all questions about nature
and life and the ultimate mystery of
Being by that one power which seems
to be peculiar to humans out of all
living beings, the power of reflective
thinking, and demanded that the
answers be true and – audacity upon
audacity – that they satisfy that power
and that power alone. That was hubris
too gross for Zeus to stomach, and if
Jehovah expelled Adam from Paradise
for desiring Knowledge, Zeus plunged
philosophers into an unfathomable
labyrinth for demanding Truth. It is thus
that twenty-six centuries later
philosophers have not one truth to show
for their labours.

Near the beginning of that long travail
one man was clear-sighted enough to
see what was wrong. Socrates saw that

by reflective thinking (reason) alone we can know nothing of natural things nor can we have answers to questions about ultimate things. The best wisdom for humans is to acknowledge that they know nothing and can know nothing. (That the astounding achievements of science do not belie this I have argued in all my writings and will revert to in these blogs shortly.) Yet that same Socrates held that only a philosophical life is a worthy life for a human being. Was he a fool?

The proper work of philosophy is to look within, to cleanse, clarify, and set in order the ideas, ideals, values, goals that constitute our characteristic nature as human beings. By the special set of ideals and values everyone of us adopts she or he makes herself or himself what she or he is. Basically we are of course the plaything of chance, but by scrutinizing and electing our ideals and values we, defying all the powers of

destiny, create our inner reality, our proper reality. This is the core-truth of Stoicism; this is the gist of Spinoza's identification of freedom with adequate ideas; this is the prophecy of Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound*. Without philosophy we go in life doubly the playthings of powers we know not, without ever being in possession of ourselves, without ever being our true selves.

Further, when in philosophizing we confront the riddle of ultimate Reality and wrestle with the mysteries of Being and Life and Mind, and, without deceiving ourselves into thinking we can have any truth about these riddles and mysteries, create for ourselves visions in which the riddles and mysteries assume coherence and intelligibility, we thereby create for ourselves, over and above our human reality, a new dimension, constituting our metaphysical or spiritual reality.

For me, philosophy helps me be myself,
and helps me live and think on a plane
of reality beyond all other reality.

Dear Reader, if you find all I have been
saying nonsense, you are within your
rights. I write for myself. I write
because I enjoy playing with ideas.

February 3, 2017

SCIENCE BREEDS IGNORANCE

Science breeds ignorance. I do not mean to sound paradoxical. I assert in all seriousness that the astounding progress of science in the past four centuries or so has plunged us in darkest ignorance. To explain what I mean we have to begin with a semantic excursion.

The words 'know, knowledge' and 'understand, understanding' overlap and are often used interchangeably. This is most unfortunate since it conceals a profound distinction between two radically different states of mind. Let me illustrate this with some examples.

A certain person does a deed of great sacrifice. Science, giving an account of the deed, can describe exhaustively and accurately the state and working of every muscle, every nerve, every neuron involved in the act. This is objective knowledge; but the scientist giving the account may yet say under his breath: What a damn fool! Another observer's heart may gush at the sight or the report of the deed, seeing in it the ideals of love and nobility. This is understanding.

The sun sets on a clear lake, painting the horizon with gorgeous ever-changing colours. A physicist will tell us of light waves, long and short, and of the laws of refraction, and may bring in the physiologist to tell us of the working of the eyes and related brain centres. A painter will gasp "Ah!" and proceed to portray the scene in a landscape, not reproducing the natural scene but giving

expression to her or his inward reaction to the scene.

A lonely cloud sails across the sky. A scientist can write a bulky tome on the life-history of the cloud. Shelley composes an ode. This is not representation; this is what Plato called ‘giving birth in beauty’ (*tokos en kalôi*).

Now let us go back to our theme: Science breeds ignorance. The great achievements of science have ingrained in scientists and in the public of advanced countries the illusion that science explains everything.

Wittgenstein saw through this illusion. He wrote: “At the basis of the whole modern view of the world lies the illusion that the so-called laws of nature are the explanations of natural phenomena.” (*Tractatus*, 6.371).

Now scientists are boldly ‘explaining’ life, ‘explaining’ mind, ‘explaining’ the origin of the world. This illusion is not

only blinding us to our own inner reality and to the whole realm of values but is also robbing us of the sense of wonder at the mysteries of Life, Mind, and Being. I cannot go into this more fully here or I will be re-writing all that I have written from my first book to the present day.

February 8, 2017

WHAT IS KNOWLEDGE?

I have repeatedly affirmed, from my first book onwards, that knowledge is an ultimate mystery and that in vain do we seek to say what knowledge is or how it comes that there is such a thing as knowledge. On the face of it, this sounds like a preposterous denial of a whole field of philosophical thinking, namely Epistemology. I hope I am not that mad; but before I explain my position I have to say something about my way of writing philosophy.

I do not write scholarly dissertations; I write philosophical essays — an entirely distinct art: this is true even of

my book-length works. A philosophical essay focuses on and explores a core insight. In thus focusing on a single idea it sacrifices any attempt at ‘completeness’ and neglects to smooth rough edges. A short while ago I posted a blog titled “Science Breeds Ignorance”. At least one reader completely missed my point, thinking me to equate scientific knowledge with ignorance, although I had taken pains to explain that I was not speaking of common knowledge and common ignorance: I was speaking of the ignorance of spiritual realities and values.

To go back to where I started: In maintaining that knowledge is an ultimate mystery do I banish all theoretical thinking about knowledge? Not at all. Epistemology can do and does do useful work on such questions as how do we acquire knowledge or what are the marks (criteria) of

knowledge as opposed to illusion or belief? But I adamantly insist on two points: (1) No such studies can ever tell us what knowledge is or explain how it is that there is intelligence and understanding. (2) There can never be a final and definitive theory of knowledge.

I will take up the second point first but only briefly. There is no objective thing called 'knowledge' that can be subjected to observation and analysis. Knowledge is the whole universe of intelligent discourse and that encompasses all there is. Every theory of knowledge approaches that limitless and amorphous totality from a certain perspective. That is why there will always be rival theories and no one theory can be free from intrinsic defect. The endless controversies of scholars is testimony to this. To assert that one particular theory is the one true theory of knowledge is to say that the elephant

is a long pliable tube and that is all there is to know about it.

As to the first point (my holding that knowledge is an ultimate mystery) I call Plato to witness. To ‘explain’ the mystery of knowledge Plato introduced the myth of *anamnêsis* (recollection). In the *Theaetetus* he examines various approaches to empirical knowledge and finds them all defective. I examined the *Theaetetus* in Chapter Nine, “Theory of Knowledge”, of *Plato: An Interpretation* (2005) and dealt with “Plato’s Examination of Knowledge” (in *Metaphysical Reality*, 2014) and do not wish to expand on the subject here.

February 13, 2017

HAS PHILOSOPHY A HISTORY?

Does philosophy have a history? To answer this question we have first to observe that 'philosophy' is not a unitary term. From the beginning of Western philosophy in Ionia around the sixth century BC philosophy has been closely associated with physics, astronomy, and mathematics. These are sciences characterized by the accumulation of positive knowledge; hence they have histories through which there runs a continuous line of development. In philosophy there is a perennial core of questions about the meaning of this world we find ourselves thrown into, of the nature of a human

being, of the meaning of life and what we can make of life. These are questions that have puzzled the human mind ever since humans acquired the power of reflective thinking. These are questions that have to be ever faced anew, ever answered anew, and that can never be answered once and for all, for the simple reason that in facing and answering these questions human beings constitute their individual characters and determine the meaning and value of their individual lives.

As such philosophy is not a cumulative acquisition of positive knowledge and hence does not have a continuous line of development that can be depicted as a history.

Of course there are certain disciplines associated with philosophy, such as logic, and certain ancillary techniques, that show development. We have a parallel to this in poetry and

drama and art. In all of these there has been much development in exteriors, but fundamentally they all address the everlasting quandaries of being and life and meaning and we have the same depth of insight in Sophocles as in Goethe. Our world today with its computers and space probes is very different from the world Shakespeare lived in, but the heart-wringing questionings of Hamlet or of Lear are still our questionings.

Since the questions of philosophy live as long as humanity lives and since philosophy (in the restricted sense in which I take the term) does not have and can never have a store of positive knowledge, how does philosophy function? A. N. Whitehead, one of the profoundest thinkers of the twentieth century, wrote a fine book titled *Adventures of Ideas*. That title nicely depicts the nature of philosophical thinking. All the dialogues of Plato are

adventures of ideas. A dialogue begins as a hunt for the meaning of a certain idea. The idea is chased, discovering its relatedness to other ideas, thereby forming a fairly coherent context, but no rest is ever found there. How can there be rest in the intellectual venture when Plato tells us that the philosophic soul aspires to comprehend all things whole and in their entirety (*tou holou kai pantos aei eporexesthai*)? (*Re[public*, 486a) And this is true in all philosophical endeavour since everything in the world is interconnected, interdependent.

In the philosophical quest we play with ideas, creating intrinsically coherent contextual wholes satisfying our unquenchable thirst for intelligibility. But the wholes we create are necessarily *ad hoc* and the self-coherence is only such for us at the moment. Like a child seeing camels and storks in a passing cloud, our enjoyment

is true but not factual. Hence Plato insists we must constantly undo our dearest intellectual creations (*tas hupotheseis anairousa*) (*Republic*, 533c). It is only thus that we can enjoy the life of intelligence without falling into the dungeon of what Socrates called the worst *amathia* (ignorance), thinking that we know what we do not know.

February 15, 2017.

PLATO'S SECRET

Plato is the most read philosopher and the most studied but, in my view, he is the least understood.

In the *Phaedrus* Plato says in the clearest terms “He who thinks ... that he has left behind him any art in writing, and he who receives it in the belief that anything in writing will be clear and certain, would be an utterly simple person” (275c-d, tr. Fowler). Yet he has left us about thirty well-wrought pieces of writing of various length. Was he “an utterly simple person” or was he fooling us? Neither. He meant us to

read his artistic creations in the light of this clear warning.

Before proceeding further to elucidate what I mean by this we have to clear one hurdle. Plato was a born poet and dramatist. With maybe one or two exceptions, every one of his literary works is a creation of dramatic genius. Character portrayal, scene ‘painting’, situation depiction, are as prominent as the thought content. The dialogue is always tailored to fit the character, be it that of a Euthyphro, a Crito, or a Thrasymachus. The dramatic introductions of the *Protagoras* or the *Symposium* for instance are literary masterpieces in their own right. Sometimes the dramatic element is overwhelming. Both the *Hippias* pieces are character-comedies. The *Euthydemus* is an odd mix of farce and didactic guidance. This dramatic feast should be enjoyed but should not be

allowed to obfuscate the underlying philosophical purpose.

To get to the philosophical purpose we have to go back to the *Apology*. The *Apology* was almost certainly not the first dialogue that Plato wrote but it is where we have to begin and it is one creation of Plato's where we can take all that is said at its face value and without qualification. Perhaps the only other such one is the *Crito*.

In the *Apology* Socrates affirms that the greatest good for a human being is to discourse daily of virtue. He sums up his mission in life in admonishing all people to care above all things for virtue and for the good of their souls, these two being one and the same thing. Plato sums all this in affirming that the best life for human beings is the philosophical life. This is the gist of the *Phaedo*, not the confessedly inconclusive arguments for immortality.

Philosophy then, for Plato as for Socrates, is a manner of life, not the acquisition of a mass of factual knowledge like science or of deductive certainties like mathematics. But it is integral to the philosophical life to be constantly scrutinizing our ideas, our purposes, our valuations. In saying this we are simply unfolding Socrates' affirmation that the greatest good for a human being is daily to discourse of virtue. The philosophical life is a ceaseless search of one's mind.

Plato adds another element to the discourse that constitutes the good life: for just as we have constantly to scrutinize the ideas, aims, and values that determine the character and texture of our lives, likewise, as intelligent beings, we have to satisfy the irking questionings about the Whole and the Ultimate, the All and the 'really real'. A human being to attain the integrity of

her or his personality needs to satisfy this unquenchable urge,

But Plato is unwaveringly clear about the impossibility of there ever being a determinate, definitive answer to these questionings. As we have ever to re-consider our purposes and values, we have also ever to muse our metaphysical questionings. In the *Republic* Plato offers a vision of Ultimate Reality as the Form of the Good, but when 'Socrates' is asked to elucidate he resorts to the simile of the Sun that gives Light and Life. Likewise the Good brings forth Being, Life and Understanding but is above and beyond being, life and understanding. Thus philosophy is an endless quest. Philosophical life is the quest itself not any definite goal that the quest arrives at. Philosophy is the life of active, creative intelligence. When the mind is satisfied and is at rest it is no longer alive.

I have often said that the best philosophy is poetry and that poetry is the best philosophy. I conclude this essay by quoting two passages from two poets that clearly depict the philosophical venture. I give these without comment.

Coleridge in a prophetic passage of *Biographia Literaria*, expanding on a thought of Plotinus, speaks of ‘philosophic imagination’ as ‘the sacred power of self-intuition’. He writes:

“They and they only can acquire the philosophic imagination, the sacred power of self-intuition, who within themselves can interpret and understand the symbol, that the wings of the air-sylph are forming within the skin of the caterpillar; those only who feel in their own spirits the instinct, which impels the chrysalis of the horned fly to

leave room in its involucrum for antennae yet to come.”

Hölderlin in *Hyperion* gives us the following words, pregnant with insight and wisdom:

“Poetry ... is the beginning and the end of philosophical knowledge. Like Minerva from the head of Jupiter, philosophy springs from the poetry of an eternal, divine state of being. And so in philosophy, too, the irreconcilable finally converges again in the mysterious spring of poetry.” (Tr. Willard R. Trask)

February 18, 2017

ARE IDEALISTS FOOLS?

Someone asked: Is it foolish to be an idealist? Surely she did not have in mind any variety of metaphysical Idealism, that of Plato or Berkeley or Hegel. The question was about moral idealism.

What is it to be an idealist in morals and the practical walks of life? It is to believe with Socrates, the Buddha, Jesus, or the later Tolstoy that the best life for a human being is a life of giving, not of acquisition.

Socrates tells us that it is never right to harm anyone or to return injury for injury and that it is better to suffer

wrong than to commit wrong (*Crito*, *Gorgias*). Jesus says, “Give to everyone who asks of you, and whoever takes away what is yours, do not demand it back” (Luke 6:30).

Perhaps throughout history and all over the world only a few exceptional individuals have lived fully up to those ideals. For us others made of poorer stuff to be an idealist is candidly to believe that the best life is indeed a life enlightened and governed by those ideals. An idealist in this sense is filled with joy and gladness on the not too many occasions when she or he lives up to that ideal and is genuinely perturbed when failing to do so.

An idealist in this sense takes in all seriousness the words of Tolstoy when he says that “as long as I have any superfluous food and someone else has none, and I have two coats and someone else has none, I share in a constantly

repeated crime” (*What Then Must We Do?* Ch. II, tr. Aylmer Maude).

When we read of women, men, and children dying of hunger in Nigeria or Southern Sudan we should personally feel guilty. When we learn that half the food produced in the United States is thrown away while millions die of hunger and malnutrition elsewhere in the world we share in the guilt and should genuinely feel we share the guilt.

When rich countries get richer producing weapons that kill innocent people and producing life-saving pharmaceuticals that do not reach the needy because of the greed of the producers, we should be sincerely convinced that we are living under a world system that is cruel and unjust and must be changed.

This kind of idealism is not only sane and good but is absolutely necessary if humanity is to survive.

February 21, 2017

RELIGION, SCIENCE, AND PHILOSOPHY

The concepts of religion, philosophy, and science overlap and in many accounts fade off into each other. A widely held positivist view sees a simple linear relationship between the three: religion is primitive superstition; philosophy is a step forward in the progress of thought, leading to the victory of reason and rationality in science. This is not only simplistic but is unfortunate since it obscures the radical differences between distinct areas of human activity.

` It is true that at the beginning of reflective thinking we find the tender shoots of religion, science, and philosophy, together with poetry and art, all striking root in the common soil of human experience under the wide canopy of religion, for religion is not one thing and never was one thing but is many things bundled together.

When human beings first acquired the faculty of reflective thinking, they found themselves plunged in a strange world, as frightful and intimidating as it was bountiful and pleasant. They invented myths and fashioned gods to account for the wonders surrounding them; with prayers and sacrifices they sought to appease the Powers that bring merciful rain and devastating thunderbolts, and with song and dance to cajole them; they took note of the regularities of nature and of the properties of things; the more

thoughtful among them, filled with awe and wonder, mused within themselves.

The myths survive in extant world religions as dogmatic creeds. The prayers and sacrifices and song and dance survive in the rites and rituals of established religions.

The observation of the regularities of natural happenings and of the properties of things initiated science. When humans noted that day follows night, that the seasons recur, that two stones struck together produce a spark of fire, that water heated evaporates, they were laying the foundations of science: Relativity and quantum mechanics and IT are nothing but a development of that primitive science.

Those lonely musers, struck with awe and wonder, were philosophers. They not only anticipated Kant but improved on him: to them the mystery of 'the moral sense within' was more

profound and more awe-inspiring than ‘the starry heavens above’. Philosophy has nothing to do with the world outside but only with the inexhaustible and ineffable mysteries of our mind and our soul. Heraclitus said, “I searched myself”, and Plato knew that to have an intimation of reality the philosophic mind has “to collect and gather itself within itself, and trust to nothing other than itself, when it itself by itself considers what is in itself” (*Phaedo* 83a-b).

Philosophy is not primitive science nor is it a stage on the way to science. Philosophy is the ceaseless and endless quest to probe our inner being. It does not give us knowledge, neither knowledge about the world nor even about ourselves. It gives us insights and intimations expressed in myth and symbol that help us understand ourselves and have a glimpse of our inner reality. Even philosophers who

mistakenly thought they were providing factual knowledge about the world or demonstrable certainties of reason were inadvertently serving the true purpose of philosophy inasmuch as their visions were intimations of our inner reality.

February 26, 2017

FREE WILL IS NOT WILLPOWER

I have frequently maintained that the so-called Free Will problem is a pseudo-problem needlessly complicated by confusing free will with freedom of choice. Psychologically, choice is always conditioned by antecedents; practically it is conditioned by circumstances. Genuine free will is only evidenced in spontaneous deeds and in creative activities. I have reiterated this a score of times, primarily in “Free Will as Creativity” (in *The Sphinx and the Phoenix*, 2009). I have written these lines on coming across Carl Erik Fisher’s “Against Willpower.” I will see if I have any comments to make.

The first few words of Fisher's paper show clearly that the willpower under discussion is a species of choice. "Will I or will I not have another glass of wine?" This is a very intricate issue relating to the psychology of character and the theological problem of sin. The theological contention that we sin willfully is absurd. To say that we are free since we are free to sin is nonsense. Rather, we sin because we are not free; because, from the moment of birth, we are subjected to influences that shape and limit and control our choices. We sin because, in Spinoza's words, we do not have adequate ideas, or as Socrates says, we are ignorant. This is Socrates' much-maligned so-called intellectualism. I have gone into this many times in my writings and this is not the place to expand on it.

In my previous writings about free will I stressed the error of confusing free will with freedom of choice, but I

did not pay much attention to the theological problem. Still I don't think I will have much to add to what I said in the preceding paragraph. What concerns me is to emphasize that freedom is spontaneity and that spontaneity is creative. The antecedents of a spontaneous deed or creative act condition and colour the deed or act but do not determine it. Shelley's character, upbringing, and culture condition and colour *Prometheus Unbound*, but no god, given the data of every cell and neuron in Shelley's body and brain and every trace of memory in his mind, could predict "It doth repent me: words are quick and vain: Grief for a while is blind, and so was mine. I wish no living thing to suffer pain." Our deeds of love and valour are instances of spontaneous creativity. We are truly free when the intelligence that is our inner reality creatively outflows; not our conceptual reason but that intelligence that, to my

mind, is the ground and fount of all reality and all life. I believe that our simplest acts are free and creative in the sense that they are not physically predetermined. I stretch my hand, hold the cup of coffee, put it to my mouth, take a sip and swallow. These do not proceed mechanically one from the other but flow as elements of a single act because I want to take a sip of coffee. This is true of all human activity. Even while the vilest deed is, on the moral plane, conditioned by the vile character, on the physical plane it is not causally determined (taking 'physical' in a wide sense to include all natural processes).

I hope it will be seen from that that when I speak of free will as creativity I am thinking of two planes: On the moral plane we are only free in our best deeds and acts, in deeds of love and valour and in poetic, philosophical, and artistic creativity. On the physical

(natural) plane our acts are creative (originative) in the sense that they are not causally determined. I believe that nature never repeats itself. All natural process comes with a difference, perhaps imperceptible to our finest instruments of observation. The revolution of the earth around the sun cannot, simply cannot, be perfectly identical this year with what it was last year if only because the mass of both earth and sun has changed in the meantime and continues to change all the time.

Thus the endless fruitless controversies about the compatibility or incompatibility of free will with causal determinism rest on three errors: (1) the confusion of free will with freedom of choice; (2) the failure to distinguish between the moral plane and the metaphysical plane; (3) the error of ignoring that the processes of nature are never repetitive so that all the so-called

laws of nature are essentially approximations and are always transitional.

I think I will end this blog here (before going any further into Fisher's paper) but will only add that I do not speak of free will as a faculty but as a metaphysical principle, consistently with my metaphysical vision where I hold that ultimate Reality is sheer intelligent creativity (which I also designate creative intelligence or Creative Eternity).

February 28, 2017

DENNET'S ILLUSION

Thomas Nagel has published a penetrating review of Daniel Dennett's *From Bacteria to Bach and Back: The Evolution of Minds*:

<http://www.nybooks.com/articles/2017/03/09/is-consciousness-an-illusion-dennett-evolution/> - In what follows I

do not intend to comment on either Dennett's book (which I have not read) or on Nagel's review (which I am just beginning to read) but am simply giving some marginal thoughts that, following my inveterate habit, I note down as I read.

The very title of Dennett's book reveals the vicious rut positivist thinking cannot escape. "From bacteria to Bach" runs the title. Since we can trace the emergence of humans back to bacteria then Bach is a complicated bacterium and nothing more. As Nagel says, "Dennett holds fast to the assumption that we are just physical objects": that says it all, for that 'assumption' is just the programme of scientific inquiry. Science investigates all things, animate and inanimate, as 'just physical objects', and that is what enabled science to work all its wonders up to the digital revolution we are living through. If only scientists could acknowledge what Socrates knew long ago (and Kant re-affirmed more than two centuries ago), that 'investigation into things' only tells us about the superficialities of things but not about what is inside, perhaps the raging battle of Gods and Giants (Plato, *Sophist*, 246a-

c) would abate. It would be asking too much to expect that scientists would further acknowledge that ‘the inside’, the subjective, the *nous*, *psuchê*, *phronêsis*, is what is really real as Plato maintained.

I maintain, and have repeatedly asserted, that even if and when we succeed in making a living organism from matter and if and when we can make a computer that has initiative and will, we will only have prodded nature to produce in a short time what previously took millions or trillions of years to produce, but we will not even then have cracked the mysteries of Life and Mind, which are as stubborn as the mystery of Being.

At the root of the contrast between the “manifest image” and the “scientific image I see what A. N. Whitehead termed “the fallacy of misplaced concreteness”. We live, we experience

our joys and sorrows, ambitions and disappointments, in a world of rainbows and smiles and tears; not even Dennett or Stephen Hawking lives in a world of electrons and quarks.

My mind boggles at “design that is not the product of intention and that does not depend on understanding.”. I readily agree that there is design in DNA and I not only agree but insist that we have no need for an outside designer — but it is at this point that the tables are turned, for, to my mind, that can only mean that there is intelligence inside the DNA. And if Plato insists that all things are fundamentally nothing but *dunamis*, I say that Reality is ultimately intelligent creativity.

I also pause at: “organisms like bacteria and trees that have no comprehension at all”. What justification do we have for making such a statement? That only humans

have conceptual thinking is something we can believe. But what do I know about what goes on inside any other being other than myself?

Nagel refers to ‘an illuminating metaphor’ of Dennett’s where he asserts that the manifest image that depicts the world in which we live our everyday lives is composed of a set of user-illusions,”. I suppose these useful ‘user-illusions’ are the concepts (Plato’s forms) that the mind creates to give identity and meaning to things and events. I often term them ‘fictions’, particularly those used by scientists, because they do not represent actual things. It is the intelligence behind those illusions that is the one reality we know and know immediately and indubitably. All else is passing shadow. — But what Nagel goes on to say indicates that Dennett rather had in mind our bodies’ and nature’s processes, which is a different thing, about which however I

see no problem. I am grateful that I am not conscious of the working of my liver and kidneys. — But again, when the ‘user-illusion’ is tied to the ‘manifest image’ we are back to the “fallacy of misplaced concreteness”. The colour and the scent of the rose are not an illusion any more than the thirst-quenching water is an illusion because to the scientist it is a combination of hydrogen and oxygen.

A “mindless machine (can) do arithmetic perfectly” for the simple reason that the whole of arithmetic is an artificial structure created by the human mind on the basis of the brilliant idea of the number series.

A marginal question by the way: for an illusion to be an illusion must there not be a mind that fabricates the illusion and entertains the illusion?

How language originated is a legitimate concern of science but as a

philosopher what matters to me is that language gives me a meaningful world where I live a meaningful life. It would be sheer folly to deny myself the enjoyment of that life because Dennett labels it an illusion. Dennett does not commit that folly: he enjoys writing books and enjoys the celebrity those books bring him.

The “biological evolution of the human brain” may have given us conceptual reflective thinking which is the glory and the bane of human beings, but to my mind, we have a profounder intelligence evidenced in our spontaneous activity and in poetic and artistic creativity and I see no reason why that profounder intelligence may not be shared by all life or even all being. This I call a metaphysical myth, for about ultimate things we must confess that we know nothing, but mythologize we must, for in mythologizing we create for ourselves

visions in which we live intelligently in intelligible worlds. Call that illusion if you will; I call it creative thinking. Further I maintain that when we acknowledge our myths to be myths, then that clears it of self-deception.

I don't say with Nagel "if Dennett is right that we are physical objects": of course we are physical objects, but we are other things as well. I prefer to see a human being as a unity of multiple planes of being. I explained what I mean by this in several places of my writings: what I want to affirm here is that however we might have become what we have become, what concerns me as a human being is that my mind, my thought, my feelings, my ideals are what give me character and value and worth; what concerns me as a philosopher is to assert that I find these more real than galaxies and electrons and quarks. The reductionist standing before a bed of daisies closes her or his

eyes to the flowers and only sees the soil.

To say that “consciousness is not part of reality in the way the brain is” is a platitude. Of course consciousness is not objective and therefore not observable or measurable; it is sheer subjectivity; and of course there is no such thing as consciousness because consciousness is not a thing; and the word ‘consciousness’ does not correspond to any entity since it is a token we use for our inner reality, hence I am prepared to call it (the word, the concept) a fiction, but that is what I call all concepts and in the first place the concepts of science; Dennett calls consciousness a user-illusion, I say it is the one reality of which we are immediately and indubitably aware. (In my writings I regularly shun the word ‘consciousness’, preferring to speak of mind or intelligence instead.)

Without intending any offence, I think that Dennett's position can be characterized as a kind of reverse insanity. An insane person lives in a world of her or his own not shared by others. Dennett chooses to deny himself the world shared by all others seeing it as an illusion, though he is obliged to share in it in practice.

When we say that the concept of mind "does not capture an inner reality" that only means there is no object within us to capture and that is perfectly true. Our inner reality, as I have repeatedly asserted, is not an object; I refuse even to call it an entity; it is sheer creative intelligence or, better said, intelligent creativity. Hence I call for a revolutionary change in our terminology: what is really real does not exist precisely because it is real; all that exists is essentially transient: Plato saw all things outside the mind as passing shadow; it is the mind and the ideas of

the mind that he indifferently called *ousia, to on, ho estin*.

What will the effect of Dennett's book be on its readers? They will certainly continue to live according to their 'user-illusions' but they will tend to belittle all things of the mind, all ideals, all sentiments, all spiritual values.

There is no denying that "there is much more behind our behavioral competencies than is revealed to the first-person point of view". I am quite happy with that. A competent physiologist would find it difficult to describe what goes on when I take a sip of coffee; this does not diminish my enjoyment. I know nothing about acoustics; that does not prevent me enjoying a Mozart concerto. And it is these, the relish of the coffee and the beauty of the music that matter to me. Here again, Whitehead's insight

regarding the ‘fallacy of misplaced concreteness’ is relevant.

I would not say that the reality of subjective experience is incompatible with scientific mechanism but that it is on a plane of being not amenable to the methods of objective science. Socrates long ago saw that the investigation into things (*en tois ergois*) and the investigation of pure ideas (*en tois logois*) answer different questions and belong to different worlds (*Phaedo*, 95e-102a). But this is a lesson that even professional philosophers have failed to absorb.

I go completely with Nagel where he says: “The spectacular progress of the physical sciences since the seventeenth century was made possible by the exclusion of the mental from their purview.” But I have to differ when he goes on to say that “science will have to expand to accommodate

facts of a kind fundamentally different from those that physics is designed to explain.” To my mind this can never be. Even if scientists achieve the dream of a ‘theory of everything’ the theory will apply only to everything physical. The things of the mind – meanings and ideals and values – can only be approached when, as Plato says, the mind by itself and in itself looks within itself. Failure to see this is what has exposed philosophy to ridicule and mockery and led brilliant scientists to talk nonsense. Science will always deal with the outside of things and philosophy with the inside, not of things, but of the mind alone.

Nagel quotes approvingly what Dennett says about the hopes we place on the development of artificial intelligence. Dennett wisely sees the real danger in that “we will *over-*estimate the comprehension of our latest thinking tools, prematurely ceding

authority to them far beyond their competence.” This is indeed a real and imminent danger. I am glad I can end on a note of agreement with both Dennett and Nagel.

March 5, 2017

CAN HUMANITY BE SAVED?

When WWII broke out I was a boy of twelve years. I remember distinctly my puzzlement at the stupidity of the world leaders who could not understand that they gain nothing by war and that if all peoples lived together amicably in peace they would all be better off. Sadly, that puzzlement has faded, not that I have become wiser but that I have become blunted. With stupidity and lunacy surrounding us on all sides we – all of us – no longer see it as something surprising but as the norm.

That the whole of the human race may be wiped out in the near future is

no longer a remote possibility. Leaving aside for the moment the real dangers of our facing our end (1) as a result of what we are doing to the natural environment, or (2) as the result of our foolishly putting ourselves at the mercy of the 'thinking machines' we are devising, the possibility of a global war cannot be ruled out.

For millennia human groups have been making war on each other. But these were always local events. Even the wars waged by the armies of a Ramses II, an Alexander, a Caesar, were of limited scope. WWI and WWII were just a foretaste of the global conflagration that can engulf the whole of humanity. The present organization, or rather disorganization, of the world system makes such a conflagration almost inevitable sooner or later.

The world is divided into, on the one hand, greedy, competing,

consumer-mad, 'advanced' countries, and, on the other hand, poor, backward, superstition-ridden countries. The economic system ruling in the advanced countries not only necessarily makes the rich countries richer and the poor countries poorer, but even within the advanced countries themselves makes favoured groups gain at the coat of the less favoured.

This inbuilt imbalance in the world system is flagrantly evident in many ways. We learn that half the food produced in the United States is thrown away while millions are dying of famine and malnutrition in various parts of Africa. The money spent on arms production in the advanced countries and on arms purchases in other countries could, I imagine, support the education budgets in all the poorer countries. A portion of the huge profits of the giant pharmaceutical producers

could fund the eradication of the endemic diseases all the world over.

We badly need a world government that would wisely manage the resources of the world for the good of all the peoples of the world. Perhaps the best hope is for the UN to develop in that direction. The first step may be to give such organizations as the WHO, the FAO, and the UNESCO more funds and overriding authority. But that the present world leaders – or any leaders likely to come to power under the conditions ruling at present – is a forlorn hope.

Perhaps the remaining alternative is for the peoples of the world to be made aware of the imminent dangers and be roused to demand the change to a saner world system. This task of enlightenment should be seriously undertaken by the thinkers, writers, and artists everywhere in the world.

DO COMPUTERS THINK?

Loose language leads to loose thinking and loose thinking leads to erroneous conclusions that can be highly pernicious. Philosophers from Plato to Schopenhauer have been warning us against this danger and yet we have been blithely speaking of thinking machines and talking of uncanny future possibilities. So let us pause for a while and rather than asking whether machines can think or whether machines will ever be able to think, let us consider the seemingly banal question: Do computers think? Marginally, let me remark that we will

go far astray when we haughtily dismiss banal questions.

Do computers think? Computers started as simple arithmetical calculators functioning mechanically. Despite all the astounding development in complexity and speed, computers are still machines that work out (process) the outcome of inbuilt relations in a closed system. Even the computers that are still being planned will only spout out what you feed into them.

Most of the ‘thinking’ we humans do is of that nature, mechanical. Even scientific thinking, except for the rare creative insight of genius, is mostly putting one and one together. Stephen Hawking when thinking purely in terms of the concepts of physics can endorse the strictly nonsensical idea of time travel (see “Stephen Hawking’s Bad Metaphysics”); when he breaks through that closed artificial conceptual

universe, he wisely warns us against the calamitous results of pollution and against the stupidity of world leaders who can easily plunge us in a nuclear holocaust.

True thinking initiates, originates, creates. We truly think only when we think creatively and then we are hardly aware of 'doing' any thinking. It is not our established conceptual system that is then at work but our inherent intelligence, so that we may say in a seeming paradox that we think best when we think least. This is analogous to what I have repeatedly stated in discussing free will, that we are truly free not when we deliberate but only when we act spontaneously.

To conclude: Does a computer think? Only if a computer of its own free will can say: *je pense, donc je suis*. So let us no more speak of thinking

machines but only of computing
machines.

March 12, 2017

PARDON, STEPHEN HAWKING!

Stephen Hawking has famously said that philosophy is dead. This, as I hope to show in what follows, is wrong, but Professor Hawking is not to blame. Philosophers have brought this upon their heads as they had previously brought upon themselves the indictment of Hume in the eighteenth century and exposed themselves to the scorn of Positivists like Rudolf Carnap and A. J. Ayer in the twentieth century. Philosophers earned that indictment and that scorn as they won Hawking's certificate of death by failing to absorb the insight of Socrates who told us in the clearest terms that investigation into

nature and probing meanings and values and purposes constitute two totally distinct non-communicating realms. (See the ‘autobiographical’ passage in the *Phaedo*, 95e-102a.) Philosophers have failed to pay heed even when Kant re-affirmed the Socratic insight: at the heart of Kant’s universally misunderstood transcendental system is the dual insight that (1) pure reason can yield no objective knowledge, and that (2) empirical investigation can only develop and systematize how things appear to us. I have been harping on this in all my writings.

Back to Hawking. The famous announcement was reported in a news report by Matt Warman in *The Telegraph* on 17 May 2011. All quotations below are from the *Telegraph* report.

“Speaking to Google’s Zeitgeist Conference in Hertfordshire”, Stephen

Hawking, we are told, “said that fundamental questions about the nature of the universe could not be resolved without hard data ...”. Only a moron will quarrel with that, but research “about the nature of the universe” not only tells us solely about things exterior to us, but I venture to say that even regarding those external things it only weaves a mantle of theoretical interpretations around our impressions of natural things. Hawking himself has given a perceptive account of the nature of scientific theory in the first chapter of *A Brief History of Time*.

Further on Hawking said that “almost all of us must sometimes wonder: Why are we here? Where do we come from? Traditionally, these are questions for philosophy, but philosophy is dead.”

To my mind the questions “Why are we here?” and “Where do we come

from?” can be answered neither by science nor by philosophy. When scientists fancy that they have answered or are on the way to answering the question “Where do we come from?” they are only giving a descriptive account of how it has come about that we are here. When scientists trace the origin of the universe to the Big Bang they have only described stages of development within the given universe; the ultimate ‘where from?’ is the eternal child’s question ‘Who made God?’ The Why question is completely outside the purview of science. The Why enquires about purpose and purpose implies will and intelligence, things science has nothing to do with. When a scientist poses a Why question she or he is simply guilty of a bad use of language.

What about philosophy? The “Where do we come from?” question is outside the purview of philosophy as the Why question was outside the

purview of philosophy. When philosophers speak about the natural world or about actual things they are simply making fools of themselves as the whole history of thought amply shows.

The “Why are we here?” question is the question for philosophy, indeed it circumscribes the whole business of philosophy. Does philosophy give a true answer to this question? Decidedly No! Philosophy answers the question by creating a myth, and precisely that is the whole use and purpose of philosophy. We are thrown into the world, how or why we will never know. By creating our own purpose and values, by giving the world and all things meanings of our own creation, we make for ourselves a plane of being in which we enjoy a life of freedom and intelligence quite beyond the sphere of nature. The theories of science also are essentially

such creations that confer meaning on an otherwise meaningless world.

Thus the notion that philosophy is dead is engendered by a misconception of the nature and function of philosophy. Trying to explain the failure of philosophy Hawking says: “Philosophers have not kept up with modern developments in science. Particularly physics.” Much as it is desirable to keep up with modern developments in science, that is not in any way necessary for a philosopher. Indeed it is whenever philosophers or scientists mix these two radically different activities that they make their worst blunders.

Hawking says: “Scientists have become the bearers of the torch of discovery in our quest for knowledge.” This is well and good but the discoveries of science are discoveries about the phenomenal world and the

knowledge gained is, I say, essentially interpretation of our observations of phenomenal happenings. So that when Hawking goes on to say that new theories “lead us to a new and very different picture of the universe and our place in it” I would say that the scientific picture of the universe has nothing to do with the philosophical vision of the world in which we live our proper life as human beings. Science may speak of ‘our place’ in the physical universe in so far as we ourselves are physical things in the world, but our place in the meaningful world of meanings, purposes, and values is for philosophy to consider.

I refrain from commenting on what Hawking says about the latest and expected developments in physics.

March 13, 2017

MIND AND MATTER

I am tired of going back again and again to discussing the positivist or physicalist approach to mind or consciousness. My position, bluntly put, is that objective science has nothing to do with the reality or nature of mind because the whole function of science is to observe, measure, systematize, theorize the appearances of things outside us and when we say outside us we do not mean outside our body since our body is itself outside that mysterious 'us' which cannot be approached by objective science because it is not in its nature to be objective since it is sheer subjectivity, mind, consciousness, soul,

or simply us. Tired I am of saying this and explaining what I mean by this; still when I came across Professor Adam Frank's Aeon essay "Minding Matter" (<https://aeon.co/essays/materialism-alone-cannot-explain-the-riddle-of-consciousness>) I could not resist the penchant for wrestling once more with the question, especially as it seems that scientists are now realizing that they have a problem. I have written these lines before looking into Professor Frank's paper, and as is my habit I will write down what thoughts occur to me as I read.

At the very outset I have to take exception to Professor Frank's reference to "that most ultimate of scientific questions: the nature of consciousness". This is not and can never be a scientific question. Mind is an ultimate mystery. Neither science nor philosophy can discover the nature of mind. Science must acknowledge that

its business is with what-is-not-mind. Philosophy, on the other hand, while it must confess that it cannot crack the mystery of mind, has yet all the time to be probing our mind as our inner reality, because only in doing that and by doing that do we possess ourselves, define the character we elect for ourselves, and act as free, intelligent agents. Science investigates *things*. Philosophy investigates meanings, ideals, values, which are all *non-existent realities* — and I do not mean this as a paradox: this is what I have been harping on in all my books and papers. These two – science dealing with things and philosophy dealing with ideas and ideals – have to be kept completely separate.

Frank broaches another very important question when he remarks that “after more than a century of

profound explorations into the subatomic world, our best theory for *how matter behaves* still tells us very little about *what matter is*". Here is another Holy Grail search that scientists would be wise to drop. Kant told us that empirical investigation only shows how things appear to us but not what they are in themselves. Long before Kant, Plato said that when the mind deals with external things, it reaches *doxa* (opinion) but cannot yield knowledge of the reality of things. The province of science is the How: how things appear, how they are related to one another, how they interact. The What is in the province of philosophy, but the only What philosophy truly knows is our own inner reality; when philosophy speculates about the What of external things it produces, in Plato's words, 'likely tales'. Plato himself said that fundamentally all things are nothing but *dunamis* (activity) (*Sophist*). Leibniz

said they are monads. Spinoza said they are modifications of the one Substance. Whitehead, when he turned to philosophy, said that reality is ultimately process and he termed things 'events'. All these (and my own 'Creative Eternity') are myths that give us the aesthetic satisfaction of seeing the world as intelligible, but if we are wise we say that in truth we do not know though we are bound to go on producing 'likely tales' that give us the comfort of seeing the world as intelligible.

Frank aptly follows the lines I quoted above by adding: "Materialists appeal to physics to explain the mind, but in modern physics the particles that make up a brain remain, in many ways, as mysterious as consciousness itself." But I cannot go with Professor Frank in seeing here a problem for science to pursue. Scientists will continue 'reducing' the brain to its physical

constituents but they will never know ‘what’ these constituents are in themselves nor know what the mind is. But I know the mind, immediately and indubitably, as my inner reality: my subjective cognizance of my mind does not give me factual knowledge about my brain or the working of my brain and the scientist’s objective factual knowledge does not give her or him understanding of the mind.

Frank seems to be sounding the death knell for “materialism’s seeming finality” when he declares it to be “out of step with what we physicists know about the material world – or rather, what we don’t know”. As I see it, ‘materialism’ (perhaps ‘physicalism’ would be a better term) is not dead and should not die. Science will continue to deal with ‘stuff’ even if that stuff is reduced to a mathematical equation, the equation will still relate to what is out there. And that will be what we ‘know

scientifically'. What we don't know (as meant in Frank's statement) is not grist for the scientific mill. When scientists busy themselves with searching for the ultimate What or the ultimate Why they are stepping into the Labyrinth Of Unanswerable Questions. (A fit title for a Borges story!)

Without claiming any knowledge of quantum mechanics or the wave function I have repeatedly argued, on grounds of pure reason, that scientific laws can never be either absolutely certain or absolutely accurate. Now Professor Frank tells us that the wave function "gives you only probabilities". That the wave function is, in Frank's words, "an epistemological and ontological mess" is the *nemesis* for scientists' stepping into areas not lawful for them.

"For a hundred years now, physicists and philosophers have been

beating the crap out of each other”, we are told. This is simply foolish of both parties. They have to acknowledge that even when they seemingly deal with the same thing, they are asking totally distinct questions.

When I encounter the phrase “everything made of (matter) – which, of course, means *everything*” I sense that we have a problem. I am made of cells and molecules and atoms and neurons. That is all I am made of but it is not all that I am. All that is my outside but there is also my inside, my subjectivity, my mind. In the case of a human being we can see (begging pardon of the reductionists) that this makes sense. What about other things? About other things, Kant tells us, we know the phenomena, and that is all science deals with and all science needs. What about the inside of things? Science does not need that and must not tamper with that, Philosophy speculates

about that to obtain a vision that makes the world intelligible, but has no right to say that that is how the world actually is. Thales said that all things are full of gods. This is not silly. It means that for the world to be not entirely baffling to us we have to imagine that there is inner intelligence in all things. Philosophers have been clothing this vision in various myths. They only err when they, disregarding the warnings of Plato and of Kant, think that by the power of pure reason alone they can reach definitive, demonstrably true, accounts about the All. Philosophers are poets regaling us with 'likely tales' that give us comfort and aesthetic satisfaction. Do we ask Shakespeare to produce evidence that the happenings of *The Tempest* actually took place?

The mind will remain unexplained as an ultimate mystery but that does not prevent me to say that I know the reality of the mind as my proper reality just as

the fact that the mystery of Being must remain unexplained does not prevent me saying that I know that I am. Those who think that by tracing the universe back to the Big Bang or the god particle or whatever they have answered the question how or why there is anything at all rather than nothing simply do not know what they are talking about.

In my view, we cannot see the world and our own being as intelligible without supposing that at the origin of all things there is intelligence and life; and I cannot see becoming, any becoming, as intelligible without supposing that at the origin of all things there is creativity; and I see intelligence and life and creativity as one thing, an eternal Act; hence I represent ultimate Reality as Creative Eternity. This is a dreamer's vision; it has nothing to do with science and science has nothing to do with it.

Frank emphasizes the failure of materialism to explain consciousness. Can we say that his position and mine are basically in agreement? I am afraid not. Frank is rather disappointed that materialism cannot explain mind. I say this is as it should be. Mind is the interiority of — of what? Assuredly of us and supposedly of all things. Science by its constitutional law of objectivity can only work on exteriors.

To give Kipling's famous verse a more truthful application we may say: 'Matter is Matter and Mind is Mind and never the twain shall meet' in a unified theory of everything because everything out there is not really everything.

Professor Frank concludes by quoting two insightful lines of the poet Richard Wilbur which I cannot refrain from reproducing here:

Kick at the rock, Sam Johnson, break
your bones:

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March 16, 2017

MIND AND MATTER

D. R. Khashaba

I am tired of going back again and again to discussing the positivist or physicalist approach to mind or consciousness. My position, bluntly put, is that objective science has nothing to do with the reality or nature of mind because the whole function of science is to observe, measure, systematize, theorize the appearances of things outside us and when we say outside us we do not mean outside our body since our body is itself outside that mysterious 'us' which cannot be approached by objective science because it is not in its nature to be objective since it is sheer subjectivity, mind, consciousness, soul, or simply us. Tired I am of saying this and explaining what I mean by this; still when I came across Professor Adam Frank's Aeon essay "Minding Matter"

(<https://aeon.co/essays/materialism-alone-cannot-explain-the-riddle-of-consciousness>) I could not resist the penchant for wrestling once more with the question, especially as it seems that scientists are now realizing that they have a problem. I have written these lines before looking into Professor Frank's paper, and as is my habit I will write down what thoughts occur to me as I read.

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be probing our mind as our inner reality, because only in doing that and by doing that do we possess ourselves, define the character we elect for ourselves, and act as free, intelligent agents. Science investigates *things*. Philosophy investigates meanings, ideals, values, which are all *non-existent realities* — and I do not mean this as a paradox: this is what I have been harping on in all my books and papers. These two – science dealing with things and philosophy dealing with ideas and ideals – have to be kept completely separate.

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D, R. Khashaba

March 16, 2017

SCIENCE EXPLAINS NOTHING

It is commonly believed that science explains things and makes us understand things and scientists themselves strongly foster that belief. There would be no harm in that belief if it did not obliterate another notion of explanation and understanding of a radically different nature and of the highest importance for humanity.

In certain areas it comes very naturally that we speak of explaining and understanding. Primitive peoples were amazed and frightened when an eclipse of sun or moon occurred. They

attributed the puzzling event to supernatural causes. Then astronomers explained how a solar or lunar eclipse happens and we have come to see that as a natural happening in the course of nature. William Harvey in the seventeenth century explained the circulation of the blood. Louis Pasteur in the nineteenth century explained microbial fermentation. These are instances where we find it natural to speak of explaining and understanding.

Let us go back to sun, moon, planets, and stars. The Babylonians and Egyptians observed the movements of the 'heavenly bodies' and recorded their regularities. Thales in the sixth century BC, probably making use of Babylonian records, predicted a solar eclipse. Ptolemy fashioned a model representing the movements of the sun and planets, taking the earth as the centre. Copernicus presented a more satisfactory model, taking the sun as the

centre. All of these observed and represented, but none of them claimed to know why the 'heavenly bodies' moved as they did.

Then came Newton. Newton found a formula the application of which enables us to calculate the movements of the earth, moon, planets, and other bodies to a satisfactory degree of accuracy. Why do they move that way? Newton's formula enables us to predict the course a body would take in its motion. But why does it do that? Newton formulated 'laws' of motion. We deceive ourselves if we think that those 'laws' explain anything. They only describe how we find things actually behave. But why do bodies move? When we move things we make an effort. Newton imagined that behind the movement of bodies there must be some kind of effort or force. He called that unknown thing gravitation but he frankly confessed he had no idea about

its nature. We might say that ‘the force of gravitation’ is Newton’s translation of his formula into the language of our sensuous experience.

Came Einstein. He found equations and formulas that enable us to calculate at a more satisfactory degree of accuracy. Why do bodies move that way? Einstein said the ‘cause’ is not gravity but the curvature of space. Do we know what space is in the first place? Is there objectively such a thing as space? Or is space simply the geometrical relations between things? If there were no things would there be space? Is the space curved or do the bodies cause space to curve? These questions have no answer because we are simply talking about what we do not know. Einstein’s notion of the curvature of space is Einstein’s translation of his equations into the language of human sensuous experience.

‘Gravity’, ‘force’, space’, ‘time’,
are conceptual fictions which we find it
useful to work with. Those who talk of
‘laws of nature that govern the
universe’ are deceived by language.
They picture the universe after the
model of a human society governed by
laws. Not that Einstein himself was so
deceived, but scientists of the highest
rank are taken in by such fictions.
Wittgenstein’s insight is lost on them:
“At the basis of the whole modern view
of the world lies the illusion that the so-
called laws of nature are the
explanations of natural phenomena.”
(*Tractatus*, 6.371)

I said above that Newton’s
gravitation and Einstein’s space
curvature are translations into the
language of our own sensuous
experience. When we move things we
make an effort or use force. Some
moderns don’t even have any use for
the notion of force. Things move

because the law of inertia says so. All things happen in obedience to the laws formulated by scientists, or rather by the god Science. They are so taken in by the practical utility of these laws that they have no need for any understanding beyond that. They fancy that the laws explain everything. So that we find even Bertrand Russell – who was not only exceptionally intelligent but was also highly alive to things human – saying that we have no need for the notion of ‘cause’: the laws of nature suffice. (“On the Notion of Cause”)

When we move things we apply force, but when we move ourselves, when I walk, when I raise my hand, when I take up my cup of coffee, I need no exterior explanation for these movements. This is the only inherently intelligible kind of movement. I do it because I want to, because I will it. Reductionists of course speak of muscles and chemicals and neurons.

These are accompaniments of the act; they describe what happens in my body when I act; but they explain nothing. I act because I want to: that is the only kind of causation I understand and all other causation is modeled on this but is not intelligible in itself.

We read or watch *Macbeth*. We understand why Macbeth killed the king. He wanted to be himself king. A forensic investigator will say that the cause of death is a dagger wound that pierced the heart. That tells us how the king died but not why. When we read a good novel we understand the characters and their actions. We perceive their motives, their ideals, their values. That is the other kind of understanding and explanation that relates to human conditions and human behaviour. That is the kind of understanding that we need as humans and for interacting with other humans.

All scientific laws describe observed regularities in nature. They enable us to calculate, to anticipate, to predict, to manipulate. This is the sum of scientific knowledge. All of our civilization (as distinct from culture) is based on such knowledge, but such knowledge does not explain anything, does not give us understanding of anything. Even in such a familiar happening as the sprouting of a plant from a seed, we can specify the elements needed – seed, soil, moisture, etc. – and describe the stages of growth up to fruition and beyond, but we are misusing the word ‘understand’ when we say we understand that process. All the processes of nature are a mystery, and if we have lost the sense of awe and amazement at the mysteries of nature, we are so much the poorer.

We human beings live our proper human life, strictly speaking, in a world of meanings, ideals, aims, values,

purposes, good and bad, clear and muddled, and to live as rational beings we have constantly to examine those ideas and values and subject them to Socratic scrutiny. Objective science is no help in this. For this we need to probe our minds and that is the function of philosophy.

We may need science to provide our means of living. But only philosophy, poetry, art, creative literature give us understanding of what we should live for.

March 20, 2017

ALAN TURING'S FALLACY

Luciano Floridi has published a highly interesting paper in The New Atlantis titled “Why Information Matters”:
<http://www.thenewatlantis.com/publications/why-information-matters> Central to Professor Floridi's paper is a lucid discussion of Alan Turing's contribution to Information science and of his famous imitation game. Over many years I have written repeatedly on the ‘Alan Turing Question’ and my first impulse on looking at Professor Floridi's paper was to revert once more to the question of thinking machines. But as I read on I found that a wider

discussion of points raised by the paper is called for.

First I have to register a reservation. Professor Floridi defines the field of his academic work as Philosophy of Information. For two decades, from 1998, when I published my first book when I was past seventy, I have been emphasizing that the failure to completely separate philosophy and science is causing grievous error on all sides. Professor Floridi's discipline is an important and much needed new branch of science. Let us call it Information Science or Information Theory or Theory of Information Science or invent for it a new name. To call it Philosophy, I am afraid, not only magnifies and aggravates the damaging confusion of science and philosophy but further consolidates the detrimental displacement of genuine philosophy by science. Indeed all the remarks and objections I shall be advancing in this

paper focus on claims that this science deals with philosophical questions which no science as science can approach.

Alan Turing devised his ‘imitation game’ (‘Turing Test’) to test artificial intelligence. Let me remark marginally that intelligence in one sense of the word, the intelligence that can be tested and measured, is neither peculiar to humans nor is it what makes humans human nor again is it what is best in humans. I need not give examples of feats performed by birds and insects that humans and their present-day computers would find difficult to imitate.

In Turing’s imitation game a human being and a computer play a game in which “certain variables (are set) in a rules-based scenario that is easily implementable and controllable”. I maintain that this rules out all that is

specifically human. Questions are put simultaneously to the human being and the computer. “If after a reasonable amount of time you cannot tell which is the human and which the computer, then the computer has passed the test — that is, the computer is at least as good as the human in providing answers to the questions you asked.” But what questions? Clearly the questions asked have to be limited to ones relating to, let me say, ‘informational content’. You cannot bring in emotions or ideals or principles unless you have fed the computer with the answers in advance. This is not a fault in Turing’s project. He only wanted to test artificial intelligence. But we can seriously err when we permit ourselves to speak of ‘answering philosophical questions’.

Floridi writes: “By suggesting the imitation game, Turing specified a level of abstraction for asking a complex question about the capability of

computers”. The idea of ‘levels of abstraction’ is fundamental in Floridi’s approach and it is this ‘level of abstraction’ that turns a philosophical question into a scientific question by sealing off all subjectivity. When I speak of Turing’s Fallacy I mean the inadvertent infiltration of the objective into the subjective domain.

Floridi says that computer science and its technological applications “have cast new light on who we are and how we are related to the world”. I will put my view briefly since this is a subject on which I have already written often and extensively. In my view, ‘who we are’ will always be determined by the idea we form for ourselves of who we are; our relation to the world likewise will be significantly determined by our interpretation of phenomena, by the vision we form for ourselves of the world. These are strictly philosophical questions. Science can examine our

physical, chemical, biological, physiological makeup, but this is not who we are. Who we are is our internal reality and what we make ourselves to be by our ideals, values, aims, principles: these are created by the mind, within the mind. Science can study their objective manifestations but not their inner reality.

Floridi goes on to say that “we are not the only smart agents able to carry out complex tasks. Our computers are often better than we are at dealing with information.” Can the information be dealt with without there being an end towards which the dealing is directed? Feed a computer with as much information as you will: without specifying the goal, the purpose to be served, the information is inert. Even for inferring the product of an arithmetical sum, you have to feed in the question to be answered. (Pardon my clumsy formulation; I confess my

ignorance but am confident that what I am saying makes sense if taken in goodwill.) What Kant said of Nature, that it will not give you an answer unless you put the question to it, applies with more force to the computer. Or shall we leave our computers to determine the direction and the goal? So when he further goes on to say that “we see ourselves increasingly as informationally embodied organisms”, I can only say, that this again leaves out purposes and values. That is why I shudder when Professor Floridi so nonchalantly takes computers to be ‘agents’: this conceals serious moral and practical implications that have to be scrutinized.

Speaking of the consequences of Turing’s ‘fourth revolution’ (after Copernicus, Darwin, and Freud) Floridi says: “Turing has changed our philosophical anthropology as much as Copernicus, Darwin, and Freud.” These

four are great scientists, but what effect their work has had on our view of ourselves was extraneous to their scientific agenda as might be the effect of a plague or a natural catastrophe. The assessment, evaluation, and, if necessary, correction of that effect is the business of philosophical thinking. Floridi seems to acknowledge this when he goes on to say that “philosophers now face the task of how best to understand ourselves in this new era.” But I have to insist that the only way to understand ourselves is to probe our inner reality inwardly, subjectively, not to study its objective concomitants and manifestations.

In the final section of his paper Professor Floridi draws an inventory of the benefits of Information. I wanted to bypass this inventory but could not resist making a brief rejoinder at certain points:

FLORIDI: “Information is, in a way, the Cinderella in the history of philosophy.”

KHASHABA: Philosophy proper has nothing to do with obtaining or engendering information or objective knowledge but only and wholly with meanings and values and purposes.

F.: “Logic ... today ... is also if not mainly a question of information extraction ...”

Kh.: Logic was always a science and a non-essential accessory of philosophy.

F.: “Ontology, the study of the nature of being, would be meaningless without informational patterns — real, virtual, necessary, possible, or even impossible.”

Kh.: Here we have the common confusion of the metaphysical notion of being or reality with the physical notion. Science is only competent to

deal with physical ‘reality’ but has no access to metaphysical reality.

F.: “The philosophy of mind needs informational mental states”.

Kh.: The so-called ‘philosophy’ of mind is the worst of all impostors. There is a science of the brain and the workings of the brain and there is the pseudo-science of psychology but the mind and the psyche can only be probed subjectively and that does not yield factual knowledge (‘informatuon’) but insight into our proper inner reality. Likewise there is science of the body and of living organisms but there is no science of Life.

F.: “...the philosophy of language without communication of information is pointless. Any philosophy of the *logos* is a philosophy of information”.

Kh.: The ambiguity of the word *logos* is a trap. If we mean ‘speech’ we can say

there is a science of speech; if we mean ‘reason’ this, in one sense, is the concern of philosophy.

F.: “Christian philosophy of religion is inconceivable without the informational concept of revelation.”

Kh.: I confess myself nonplussed. Are we to take “the informational concept of revelation” as a scientifically validated objective fact?!

F.: “To paraphrase Molière, Western philosophy has been speaking informationally without knowing it for twenty-five centuries.”

Kh.: How gratifying to know that Plato’s Form of the Good or ‘*tokos en kalôi*’ or Socrates’ ‘it is never right to return harm for harm’ is informational!

F.: Baconian-Galilean project of reading and manipulating the alphabet of the universe has begun to be fulfilled

Kh: And this, without proper philosophical understanding, will spell our doom.

To sum up: We are deluged by oceans of information. The interpretation and understanding of that information is the business not of science but of philosophy (and not Professoer Floridi's kind of 'philosophy'). When science completes its usurpation of the rightful role of philosophy that will be the end of humanity.

March 27, 2017

I DO NOT EXIST

In *Creative Eternity: A Metaphysical Myth* I said that the whole of metaphysical philosophy is summed up in 'I am'. But if 'am' is, as the grammarians tell us, part of 'to be' and if to be is to exist, then it is more metaphysically significant to say "I am not": my inner reality, my mind, my soul, my person, does not exist. Let empiricists and positivists not cheer at this for the sequel will not please them. My mind does not exist precisely BECAUSE it is REAL. My body, my flesh and bones, my brain, these exist and since they exist they are perpetually vanishing; they have no reality; they are

shadows in Plato's Cave. My inner reality – the only reality of which I am immediately cognizant – does not exist since it is not a thing, not an object, not an entity. My inner reality is sheer act, is will, is creativity. It would be misleading and confusing to see it as a creative agent: the creativity not the creator is the reality. If ultimate Reality is named God, then God does not exist, is not a creator, but eternal creativity.

The above is the gist of my metaphysics. If it looks hard to grasp that is not because of any difficulty in the thought but because it completely overturns common linguistic usages. That was inevitable. The presentation of original thought necessarily demands a semantic revolution. But the thought itself is not entirely new. Mystics, who have probed deepest into their inner reality, in speaking of God and ultimate Reality, have often spoken of Nothing, Nothingness, Dark Night, Cloud of

Unknowing. Plato's Form of the Good can neither be defined nor described but only spoken of in simile and metaphor. And Socrates' Diotima can speak of the ultimate vision only in negations (*Symposium*. 210ef.).

I maintain that my metaphysics of ultimate Reality is not an existent object or entity or even a transcendent God but as eternal creativity or Creative Eternity that can be spoken of only in metaphor and parable and myth — I maintain that this metaphysics resolves the contradictions and quandaries of traditional metaphysics and disentangles the entanglements of science and philosophy which have been harmful to both science and philosophy.

Dear Reader, if you find in what I have written above an inkling of sense, though it be obscure and confusing, I hope you will seek clarification in the numerous books in which I have been

expounding a philosophy that I claim to be original.

March 31, 2017

CONSCIOUSNESS UNEXPLAINED

Scientists and scientifically minded philosophers have been wrangling with the intractable problem of consciousness — intractable because, in my opinion, it is a pseudo-problem that neither scientists nor philosophers are justified in raising in the first place. I have dealt with the problem frequently and extensively and thought I had no need to revert to it again, but I have

been reading a rich major article by Joshua Rothman titled “Dennett’s Science of the Soul”

<http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2017/03/27/daniel-dennetts-science-of-the-soul>

The following disjointed notes are thoughts evoked by the article. I give my notes as I wrote them down while reading, with the minimum of editing. They necessarily leave much unsaid. Everything in double quotes (“”) below is from Rothman’s article..

1.

We human beings are aware of having a ‘within’, a subjective being, that we think “the rest of the material world lacks”. Do we know this? Science is not given to know the inside of things and philosophers may speculate but can never demonstrate or be certain since it is not in the nature of philosophical thinking to reach any factual

knowledge. That is the insight Socrates expressed plainly (*Phaedo*, 95e-102a) but which we have been ignoring to our detriment.

2.

We read: “How would you know whether an octopus is conscious? It interacts with you, responds to its environment, and evidently pursues goals, but a nonconscious robot could also do those things.” Here two problems are juxtaposed, not to say confused. Does an octopus have consciousness? The simple answer is: we can never know. But is the octopus a nonconscious robot as Descartes said all animals were automata? All I can say is that I am confident a little kitten has initiative, it frolics freely; a robot will only imitate it if programmed to do so.

3.

Consciousness cannot be a scientific concept. A scientific concept is a token

for observed phenomena — time, gravity, evolution, growth, decay. In itself the concept is a fiction: it represents a particular interpretation of the phenomena. The phenomenal appearances (pardon the pleonasm) of consciousness are not consciousness. Consciousness is the reality behind the phenomena: my invisible person is the reality behind my phenomenal appearances.

4.

“In the nineteenth century, scientists and philosophers couldn’t figure out how nonliving things became living. ... Only over time did they discover that life was the product of diverse physical systems that, together, created something that appeared magical.” First, we deceive ourselves when we think we understand how “diverse physical systems ... created something”. We ‘know’ but do not

‘understand’ how a seed becomes a sprout. Second, I have said this before but will repeat it: When we lose our innocent puzzlement at the magic of life, we have not grown wiser but have become blunted.

5.

If scientists will say that they are only concerned with the question how it is that it comes about that we have feelings and thoughts and intentions and that that is all they seek and all they know, there would be no quarrel between science and philosophy. Call our feelings and our intentions, our loves and our revulsions, call them effervescences or epiphenomena or illusions or what you will; they remain what is important to us, what constitutes our characteristically human life; and these are, or should be the sole concern of philosophers as they are the whole concern of poets and novelists and

musicians. Suppose I were to have a coma and in that coma to have continuous lucid dreams (happy and unhappy) and that were to continue until I finally die: which would be the life I lived, the life of my vegetating body or the dreams I lived through in my 'illusory' consciousness? So is the quarrel after all a quarrel about words? No, it is about which is more valuable, our 'too, too solid flesh' or our vanishing dreams.

6.

What is a whole? It is not the sum of its parts; it is a reality over and above the total parts. That is metaphysical reality, reality on the metaphysical plane. Hence, what reductionists call 'illusion' I call metaphysical reality, reality on the metaphysical plane.

7.

We are told that the 'creation' of *Homo sapiens* required "billions of years

of *irreplaceable* design work”—
performed by natural selection. How?
The sensible answer is: We don’t know.
Scientists insist that we know. Which,
to my mind, is not simply to be content
with our ignorance but to congratulate
ourselves on our ignorance. This is what
Socrates called the greatest *amathia*.

8.

The ‘hard problem’ is not really hard
since it is not really a problem at all. It
only looks like a ‘hard problem’
because we seek to ‘solve’ a non-
existent problem and on top of that go
about it in the wrong way.

9.

The difference between my computer
and me is not that my processes are
accompanied by an effervescence called
consciousness and the computer’s
processes lack this accompaniment. The
difference is that I initiate my processes.
It is our creativity, our originative

power, that makes us human. However smart a computer gets, it cannot deviate from what its programmer has instilled in it. And even if a computer should acquire subjectivity, we will never understand that subjectivity by studying its mechanism and its processes.

10.

Soon, it is said, a computer “may have meaningful conversations with you”. Conversations that sooner or later get insipid because they will be completely predictable. You enjoy playing chess with a computer only because the possible moves of the chess pieces are practically unpredictable.

11.

Is there mind in all things? To assert that would be to say something of the actual world and – with Socrates and with Kant – I maintain that philosophy (pure reason) can say nothing of the actual world. But I think I am within my

rights to say that I cannot find things intelligible without conceiving of ultimate reality as intelligent and of intelligence as inherent in all things.

12.

The long and the short of the problem is this: There is really no problem. We humans have an outside and an inside. The outside is physical. The inside is — what better word can we find than ‘metaphysical’? The means for studying the outside are inapplicable to the inside. Apply all the criteria of objective existence to consciousness and the return is: Nothing is there. But that nothing — and I insist it is no ‘thing’ — is what interests me as a philosopher and is all that is of value in human life. It is wrong of philosophers to say that the mind exists, because that hands it over to the scientists, and the scientists, examining it, find nothing. The cause of the quandary is that the philosophers

mistakenly assume that what is real must somehow BE, and the notion of being is ambiguous and deceptive. It is assumed that what is real must be ‘something’ and that creates all the contradictions and all the perplexities of metaphysics. To resolve these difficulties I maintain that what is ultimately real is not a thing, not an entity, but is sheer creativity, intelligent creativity: I hesitate even to call it creative intelligence because that somehow reifies it: it is the creativity that is the reality. Further, I do not say that that tells us anything about the world or the universe: I say only that is how I find things intelligible. (What I am saying here sounds enigmatic: it only becomes cogent in the context of my total metaphysical outlook.)

13.

There is nothing wrong with ‘materialism’ — that is the ground

material of all objective science: I even have no objection to saying that that is all there is. What I strongly object to is to think that that is what is real. Plato did not deny the actual existence of visible things, but he maintained that it is the intelligible (as opposed to the perceptible) that is real. I call my philosophy a version of Platonism.

14.

Dennett challenges Chalmers to name “a kind of experiment that would get at ‘first-personal data,’ or ‘experiences’”. That’s just it! Empiricists think that only what can be verified experimentally is ‘real’. Subjectivity cannot be objectified. Once you objectify it, it is no longer subjective. Kant tried in vain to objectify the transcendental unity of apperception. (Let me add here that I acknowledge all that Dennett expounds positively. He only goes wrong when he thinks that

scientific research and learning can answer philosophical questions. Dennett – a very great lovable man as Rothman pictures him – thinks like a scientist. Philosophical questions are strictly meaningless to him.)

15.

Grant me that my feelings, my ideals, my aims matter most and I will grant you that they are all products of physical processes, but I maintain that your physical bodies and processes (1) in themselves are fleeting shadows; (2) in themselves have no meaning; all the meaning you attach to them is conferred on them by your concepts and theoretical assumptions. On the other hand my feelings and values are real in themselves and meaningful in themselves. My mind and the workings of my mind are what I know immediately and indubitably and they are what I live for and live by.

16.

Rothman writes: “I couldn’t understand how neurons—even billions of neurons—could generate the experience of being *me*.” That we will never understand. Science does not, can not, give understanding. Science can never tell us what things are but only how things work. (Again the opposition of ‘knowledge’ and ‘understanding’ has meaning only in the context of my philosophy and my special terminology.)

17.

Cases of brain damage have no relevance to my position. It is as if a person relapsed to a lower stage of evolution. An individual might lose or might never develop the powers of conceptual thinking peculiar to humans. When we die we revert to the plane of physical being. What remains of us is then totally encompassed by physics

and chemistry. That does not mean that Life is nothing but the physical constituents of the body. My position is that philosophy is solely concerned with the realm of ideas and values that constitute our proper human being. This realm has nothing to do with science and science as science has nothing to do with it.

18.

The ‘hard problem’ is a delusion generated by scientists meddling in philosophical questions and by philosophers venturing into the realm of factual knowledge.

19.

Our trouble, scientists and philosophers alike, is that we fail to confess our ignorance. The methods of science can show us how things work and how they turn into this or that, but can never tell us what things ultimately are or why they are. Philosophical reflection gives

us insight into our inner reality and gives us a clearer understanding of our ideas and purposes, but can never give us any factual knowledge about things outside 'us', and that includes our bodies and brains. And we are not given to mix these two radically distinct modes of 'knowing' or to relate them in any way. Any attempt to do that plunges us into the fathomless labyrinth of illusory problems like that of the 'hard problem of consciousness'.

20.

The soul is just what is other than body. Descartes led modern thought into its gravest error by his doctrine of two substances. Mind is what is not substance; we might say it is the transcendent unity of the body, the reality over and above the actuality of the body. And I hasten to say that what I am saying is a myth, because we in fact do not know; the mind

(understanding, intelligence) is an ultimate mystery, and of ultimate mysteries we can only speak in myth, as Plato spoke of the Form of the Good only in myth and parable

21.

To speak of “the reality of the material mind” to me sounds like speaking of the squaredness of the rectangular circle!

April 3, 2017

WHAT IS PHILOSOPHY?

I

Philosophy has always meant different things to different people. Since the close of the nineteenth century the term has been applied to studies that neither Plato nor Aristotle would have found related to what either of them meant by philosophy.

There is nothing wrong of course with there being numerous diverse fields of thought with distinct methods and objects and objectives. But things go wrong when discipline A, misled by a community of name, finds fault with discipline B because it does not apply

A's methods or adopt its object and objectives. In science, for instance, it would be wrong for physicists to think that, because the ultimate constituents of living cells are such as physics studies, physics tells us all we need to know about living cells. In the case of the diverse disciplines claiming the title 'philosophy' (now wildly proliferating) this fault is rampant and is highly damaging. Philosophies modeled on empirical science have actually bamished yraditional philosophy as nonsense. But the diversity of types of philosophical thinking is not a modern phenomenon.

II

In China and in India, in Mesopotamia and in Egypt, in Persia and among the Hebrews there was wisdom. But philosophy started in Ionia in the north-

eastern corner of the Mediterranean. Philosophy is first distinguished by being private; every philosopher thought for himself, pursuing questions that irked her or him, seeking solely to satisfy her or his own mind, claiming no authority and demanding no following.

The questions that the earliest philosophers sought answers for, were diverse and varied and hence from the very start there were different types of philosophical pursuits. The first Milesian thinkers, Thales and Anaximander and Anaximene, seem to have puzzled about the ultimate constituents of all things and how the world has come to be as we find it. Xenophanes debunked the common vulgar notions about the gods. Heraclitus and Parmenides were interested in questions that have come to be designated metaphysical. Socrates looked into the ideas, ideals, values, and aims that govern human life and asked

what life is best for a human being to live. Socrates' philosophy was thus a philosophy of life and for life.

Plato, profoundly impressed by the character and moral stance of Socrates, was simultaneously deeply immersed in the questions that had engaged Heraclitus and Parmenides: What is real? What is ultimate Reality? Fusing Socrates' moral interests with his metaphysical questionings, Plato developed a vision of the philosophical life as the ideal life for a human being, involving a vision of ultimate Reality, and implying a distinctive view of the nature of philosophical thinking. This Platonic philosophy has sadly been misunderstood and ignored. In particular, learned scholarship has been guilty of making a travesty of it.

Let us stay a while with these two last-mentioned great thinkers. It is strictly impossible to draw a clear line

between the thought of Socrates and the thought of Plato, but for the purposes of exposition it is unavoidable and perhaps not unhelpful to make a conjectural separation.

III

At his trial Socrates declares : “...while I have life and strength I shall never cease from the practice and teaching of philosophy” (Jowett’s wording). How did he ‘teach philosophy’? By interrogating, questioning, examining, and cross-examining all he met. It is of vital importance to grasp the significance of this.

Socrates saw that we owe our distinctive human nature to our life and actions being governed by ideas, ideals, values, purposes all bred in the mind and having no being outside the mind.

When these ideas, values, and purposes are confused, muddled, and entangled we go in life fumbling in the dark, not knowing what we are or what we are doing. This is the insight that Spinoza, twenty-two centuries later, was to express by saying that when we act on inadequate ideas we are not free. On the other hand, to be clear about our ideas, values, and purposes is to enjoy the proper virtue, the special excellence of a human being. That distinctive excellence, that proper virtue of a human being, Socrates referred to as that within us which is benefited by doing what is right and harmed by doing what is wrong. For short it may be named *psuchê* (soul) or *nous* (mind, reason). Consequently he held that, if life is not worth living with a diseased body, it is much less so with a diseased soul (*Crito*, 46b ff.).

Thus Socrates was exclusively concerned with the mind and the things

of the mind. In the *Phaedrus* when Phaedrus asks him if he believes the popular legend of Boreas carrying Orithuia away, Socrates says:

“... I have no time for such things; and the reason, my friend, is this. I am still unable, as the Delphic inscription orders, to know myself; and it really seems to me ridiculous to look into other things before I have understood that. ... I look ... into my own self: Am I a beast more complicated and savage than Typhon, or am I a tamer, simpler animal with a share in a divine and gentle nature?” (229e-230a, tr. Alexander Nehamas and Paul Woodruff)

Those things of the mind that were Socrates' sole concern are intelligible as opposed to the perceptible things reported to us by our senses of the outer world including our body. In the *Phaedo* there is a most important

passage of some half-a-dozen pages (95e-102a) that is strangely overlooked by professional philosophers and learned scholars. Responding to a difficulty raised by Cebes in the argument, Socrates says, “The whole question of the cause of generation and corruption will have to be examined.” He proceeds to give an account of his youthful wrestlings with the question. It turns out that in the end he had to renounce all search for physical causes which, he found, cannot answer any of the questions that concerned him as a philosopher. The answers to these and all the understanding we need for the guidance of human life are to be found within our own minds, in the ideas engendered in and by our minds. Socrates exemplifies the difference between physical ‘explanation’ and philosophic explanation: he is seated on his prison bed; the scientist will account for his posture by giving an account of

his bones and muscles and sinews; the philosopher will say that he is there because his principles dictate that he remain in prison and suffer execution rather than escape as his friends urged him to do (98b-99b). This is the whole difference between scientific and philosophic investigation. The former always tells us how things are or come to be but never what or why things are. Ignorance of this radical distinction is responsible for all the needless wrangling between scientists and philosophers.

Socrates explains another profound aspect of philosophic understanding. He says that he had previously thought “it was obvious to anybody that men grew through eating and drinking, for food adds flesh to flesh and bones to bones” and so on (96c-d, tr. G.M.A. Grube) but he was no longer satisfied with that kind of explanation. He now thought that only the idea of Growth gives us

understanding of growth. Our philosophers and erudite scholars find this hard to grasp but it is essential for understanding of the whole Socratic-Platonic position. Let us imagine Adam in the Garden of Eden. There are trees everywhere; these are accepted as they are without difficulty. But a young shoot draws his attention. The next day he looks at it and it seems not to have changed. But in a few days there is something puzzling about it; it is the same and yet not the same. Then it flashes in his mind: it has grown; this is growth.

Socrates elucidates further. He will no longer allow himself “to say that where one is added to one either the one to which it is added or the one that is added becomes two” (95e-97a, tr. G.M.A. Grube) but will only hold that the two is two or becomes two by the idea Two. The human mind created the number series and only then did things

become numbered. The savage may have the idea One and the idea Two but not the idea Three: To her or him three, seven, twenty are all equally just 'many'.

This is the gist of what has come to be known as the Platonic Forms. The world presents to us through our senses impressions that in themselves mean nothing. It is only when the mind clothes the impression in a Form that the dumb impression becomes a meaningful sensation for us. Kant was to re-discover this: It is the gist of his Copernican revolution.

Socrates sums up the outcome of his search for causes. When he found that he could not find answers to his philosophical questions by investigating outer things, he gave up all such investigations and turned to seeking understanding by examining the ideas in the mind (99d-100a). This is the crucial

separation of objective (scientific) investigation and subjective (philosophical) speculation that Socrates insisted on and that both scientists and philosophers have failed to heed with damaging consequences.

IV

The Socratic separation of the intelligible and the perceptible was the foundation of Plato's theoretical thinking. In the *Phaedo* (which may be seen as the epitome of Plato's philosophical position) 'Socrates' introduces the idea that a philosopher lives not for the things of the body but for the things of the mind or soul, such as the ideals of justice and temperance and beauty. Such ideas, the idea of justice for instance, is the *ousia* of whose being philosophers give account in discourse (78d). He then simply suggests that we posit two kinds of

being, the one visible, the other invisible (79a). This is the cornerstone of the whole of Plato's epistemology, ontology, and axiology.

At his trial Socrates says that "it is the greatest good for a human being daily to converse of virtue" and that "the unexamined life is not a life for a human being" (*Apology*, 38a). That indeed sums up the Socratic-Platonic conception of the philosophic life. We read in the *Phaedo*:

"When the soul (mind) all by itself reflects, it moves into that which is pure, always is, deathless, and constant, and being of a like nature to that, remains with that always, whenever it is possible for it to be by itself, and then it rests from wandering, and in the company of that, is constant, being in communion with such; and it is this

state that is called intelligence
(*phronêsis*)” (79d).

Philosophy, purely and simply, is
the act of philosophizing, of examining
one’s mind or another’s mind.

Philosophical insight is the
luminescence of this active creative
self-examination, not any result thereof.
The philosophical life is the constant
exercise of creative intelligence.

In the *Republic*, in the seminal
central part (472a-541b) that scholars
see as a mere digression, we read that
“the philosopher reaches out for the
Whole and the All, aspires to behold all
time and all being” (486a). But this
must not be misunderstood. The whole
of the philosophic endeavour is summed
up by Plato in a prophetic passage that I
have quoted many times before and will
quote again:

“... a true philosophical nature
aspires to what IS, does not tarry by

the many particulars that are supposed to be, but goes forth with no blunting and no slackening of her desire, until she grasps the essence of all reality by that in her soul to which it is becoming to grasp that (that is, what is akin), approaching and mingling with what has true being, gives birth to reason and reality; enjoys knowledge and true life and is nourished, and then has relief of her birth pangs ...” (490a-b).

This is oracular and is to be understood as an oracle is to be understood: The whole of the philosophical journey begins and ends in the mind in the same way as the ascent to the Form of absolute Beauty described in the *Symposium*, and the reality attained, the reality the philosopher communes with, is the reality of the philosopher’s own mind, and just as in the *Symposium* the lover

attaining the vision of Beauty will give birth not to images but to true virtue (212a) so here the philosopher communing with her or his inner reality gives birth to reason and reality.

Further on in the *Republic* when Socrates is asked about the highest wisdom he answers that it is the Form of the Good (505). When he is pressed to give an account of the Form of the Good, Socrates gives an allegory representing the sun as the offspring of the Good and as the sun is the source of light and sight but is itself more than light and sight, so the Good is the source of mind and the intelligible, giving the things known their reality and giving the knowing mind the power of knowing, but is itself beyond mind and the intelligible (508e-509a). For Plato no philosophic insight can be conveyed in a definite formulation of word or thought. The philosophic insight is an illumination engendered in

the process of philosophizing and can only be represented in myth and parable. That is the reason why Plato insists that the grounds of any philosophic statement must regularly be destroyed by dialectic (533c). This also explains what he tells us emphatically in the *Phaedrus*:

“He who thinks, then, that he has left behind him any art in writing, and he who receives it in the belief that anything in writing will be clear and certain, would be an utterly simple person ...” (278c-d, tr. Fowler).

Consistently with this Plato did not write any systematic philosophical work. He wrote dramatic pieces that have to be read as drama, not to seek any truth or extract any doctrine from what is said in them, but to engage in dialogue with the speakers, think along with them, and above all think for

oneself. We read a Platonic dialogue not to learn anything from it but to philosophize for ourselves. This is how we pay due homage to Plato.

V

Above, particularly in sections III and IV I have tried to delineate one type of philosophy, the one I have been promoting in all my writings, that I usually refer to as philosophy proper and have otherwise designated prophetic or oracular philosophy. In this concluding section let me outline the special version I have developed for myself.

Following Socrates I hold that philosophy has nothing to do with the actual outer world. That is the domain of objective science. Science studies, or rather interprets, the appearances of things. It can neither know the true nature of things nor why they are there.

That is strictly true of all scientific knowledge: all scientific concepts and theories are creations of the mind, conceptual patterns in which the mute phenomena acquire meaning and being.

Philosophy looks into the mind and the ideas in the mind. Following Plato I say that these ideas are realities as opposed to the flux of external existents: they are all that we know of reality; more strictly speaking, our active, creative mind is the one and only reality of which we have immediate, direct, and indubitable cognizance. In probing our mind we have insight of our inner reality, That reality, that insight, is strictly ineffable. It is of the nature of mystic experience and, like all mystic experience, cannot be given any definitive expressions. Hence philosophers can only convey their insights in oracular visions and myths. Plato's profoundest insights are to be found in the vision of the celestial

abode of the Forms (*Phaedrus*), in the fable within a fable of Diotima's account of the ascent to the Form of Beauty, in the Form of the Good which cannot be spoken of, in the notion of Procreation in Beauty, in the myth of Reminiscence, in the 'likely tale' of the *Timaeus*, in innumerable poetic flights throughout the dialogues.

The philosopher, as Plato says in the *Republic*, "reaches out for the Whole and the All, aspires to behold all time and all being". I believe that every sound human nature experiences this longing to belong to the All, this yearning that Shelley symbolizes in "The desire of the moth for the star, / Of the night for the morrow, / The devotion to something afar / From the sphere of our sorrow". This longing for the All, breeding the idea of the All, gives a human being wholeness, integrity. It is the source and fount of all philosophic concepts of ultimate Reality, from

Parmenides's One to Plato's Form of the Good to Spinoza's *Deus sive Natura*. But we have to acknowledge (1) that it is our idea, of our own creation; (2) that all representations of it are necessarily mythical, (It is foolish of philosophers to quarrel about which representation is 'true'.)

For a long time I sought a formula to cover all becoming until I saw at last that Becoming, like Being and like Mind, is an ultimate mystery; that reality is a perpetual becoming, a constant creativity, that indeed I cannot conceive of ultimate Reality except as (a) intelligent, (b) whole, and (c) creative. Hence I say that ultimate Reality is creative intelligence or intelligent creativity: I prefer this latter designation since I cannot conceive of ultimate Reality as an existent thing or entity but as sheer creativity. It is not an intelligent creator but intelligent creativity; it is the creativity, the act not

the acting agent, that is the reality. I name it Creative Eternity. It is a difficult notion because it flies in the face of common modes of thought and language. But I feel it is the notion that mystics have long intimated when they spoke of their profoundest experience as Nothingness, Dark Night, and the kike.

If the metaphysical idea of Reality as the whole and the ultimate is an emanation of our mind as our inner reality it also gives us assurance of and insight into that inner reality of ours.

That is the alpha and omega of all philosophy worthy of the name.

April 11, 2017

SUBJECTIVE REALITY

Sympathetic readers of my writings have been put off by my use of the terms 'real' and 'reality' and though I have repeatedly stated that my choice of term may have been unfortunate and though I have repeatedly explained my special usage of the term and insisted that readers take the term in the special sense I give it, all that has not removed the misunderstandings and difficulties. So here once more I will try to clarify my position.

In ordinary usage what is 'real' is what is out there, what exists, what is actual, what is physical, what is

objective, what can be empirically verified. I do not question the existence, the actuality, the objectivity, etc., of all that. But you have a plethora of words for that one thing. I need one special word to apply uniquely to what is opposed to that: what is in here, what is subjective, what is meaningful in itself without depending on or having reference to anything outside the mind. So give me the one word 'real' and I leave you all the others, primarily 'exist' and 'existence'. And I do not deny you the use of the term 'real' in the common connotation. But when we are discussing metaphysics, and particularly in connection with my philosophy, let us be clear which 'real' we are referring to.

What I term 'real' is, in Platonic language, the intelligible as opposed to the perceptible, and I hasten to assure you that when I say that the intelligible is real I definitely do not mean that it is

out there or that it exists in the ordinary sense of the word. I scrupulously avoid the use of the terms 'exist' and 'existence' in relation to metaphysical reality. With Socrates-Plato I assert that Justice, Loyalty, and even mathematical Equality are nowhere in the natural world.

Why, you may ask, insist on the word 'real'? Why not simply speak of the subject and subjectivity? I have two reasons why I insist on using the term in this special sense which is causing me so much trouble.

The first reason is axiological. We need to emphasize that all life and all value are in the intelligible realm. The natural world, apart from our ideals and values and dreams is as nothing. The galaxies are not more worthy of the title 'real' than my joy or grief or a baby's glee. However I will not amplify on this thought here.

The second reason is metaphysical. When we come to consider our notion of ultimate Reality, I find that what is ultimately real cannot be a thing or an object or even an agent or creator. To my mind, all that exists is necessarily determined by what it is not, depends on what is other than it, and is necessarily transient, evanescent. What is real I conceive as the activity, the creativity, that brings about all the perpetually vanishing existents. This ultimate Reality I say does not exist since it is never a determinate something. It is the Act, not something that acts, but the sheer activity. All the determinate things it brings forth, in the very act of coming into being are passing away; what is lasting, eternal, is the creativity, not a substantive creator.

Kierkegaard says: Truth is subjectivity. I say, the real is the subjective; it is real inasmuch as it does

not exist; and the subject is the unique reality we have cognizance of.

I have been expounding these thoughts in many books and papers, particularly in *Quest of Reality*, *Metaphysical Reality*, and *Creative Eternity: A Metaphysical Myth*. Here I am merely clarifying a terminological confusion.

April 19, 2017

PLATO'S GREATEST HOAX

I

INTRODUCTION

After the execution of Socrates, Plato left Athens and spent several years moving around. The duration of his voluntary exile is differently assessed by different scholars; but that it was years rather than months is undisputed. He must have been mulling what to do with his life. He had been profoundly influenced by the character, life, thought, and ideals of Socrates and he felt it his duty and his mission to preserve all of that.

Plato knew that to the last Socrates maintained that he had no philosophy to teach. When at his trial Socrates declared that it was his mission to teach philosophy and virtue, he made it clear in the sequel that he did that by questioning people, seeking to make them examine themselves and correct their evaluations and their priorities. And even if Plato had not yet definitely articulated the thought in the words of *Phaedrus* 275c-d, yet he was already convinced that philosophical insight is not something to be conveyed in set words but is a fire kindled through the converse of minds. (See *Protagoras*, 347c-348a, *Phaedrus*, 274b-278e, Epistle VII., 341b-345a.)

Plato was a born poet and it is said that he had attempted drama in his early youth. He now started writing dramatic pieces to keep alive the memory of Socrates and do homage to “the best, and wisest, and most righteous man”.

No more than Aeschylus or Sophocles would Plato use drama to propagate positive doctrine. In his dramatic pieces the arguments themselves are among the *dramatis personae*; they have their role in the drama. The end of a Platonic dialogue is not a conclusion established argumentatively but a total impression created artistically, a vision.

Naturally every piece would aim at specific effects and not one piece of Plato's works serves solely a single purpose. The two *Hippias* pieces make fun of the bombastic sophist. In the *Hippias Minor* whose paradox puzzles erudite scholars the paradox is the crux of the drama. It has a hidden proviso: intentionally (*hekôn*) doing what is bad – *if that were possible* – would be better than doing what is bad unintentionally (*akôn*). In the *Crito*, when Crito says that the many can inflict the greatest harm, Socrates says, "Would that the many could inflict the greatest harm, for

they would then be capable of doing the greatest good” (44d). For Socrates-Plato capability, knowledge, virtue are inseparable. As Spinoza was to say, only one with adequate ideas acts; with inadequate ideas one is simply driven hither and thither.

The dramatic genius of Plato needs no showing. In the opening part of the *Crito* you can touch the quivering vocal chords of the good old man, choked with anxiety and grief. The *Protagoras* is a masterpiece of character portraiture, not only of Protagoras but of all the participating individuals. I wonder why no literary critic has made a full study of Plato's works as sheer drama.

The *Apology* and the *Crito* stand apart as perhaps the only dialogues that are to be taken at face value, (which is not the same as taking them for factual accounts: dramatic truth is deeper than fact). I could take up the dialogues one

by one to show that argument is the element of least import in them. If, as I approach my ninetieth birthday, I could reasonably count on having two more years or so, I would set on doing that as my last work. But now I will be content with demonstrating my point by going through the *Phaedo*.

The *Phaedo* is clearly a multi-purpose dialogue. In the first place it was to immortalize the heroic martyrdom of Socrates. This provides the narrative framework. Along the way it ranges over five fields. (1) The Socratic conception of the intelligible realm. (2) Praise for the philosophic life as the best life for a human being. (3) Integrally connected with this, affirmation of the divinity of the soul. (4) In the 'autobiographical' passage (95e-102a), curiously neglected by all scholars, we have the Socratic-Platonic definition of the nature and scope of philosophical thinking. (5) Then we

have the argument for immortality which I designate as the great hoax. We will take up these five threads one by one in this order. In what follows I have made use of Chapter Five, “The Meaning of the *Phaedo*”, of my *Plato: An Interpretation* (2005), I confess that this paper has been partly a cut-and-paste job.

II

THE INTELLIGIBLE REALM

Socrates was convinced that we are human only inasmuch as we live in a world formed by the ideas and ideals that are born in the mind. This was the basis of the Socratic distinction between the intelligible and the perceptible realms and this insight was the first foundation of the Socratic-Platonic vision.

The perceptible we find all around us in the world; the intelligible – *to noêton* – we do not 'find' anywhere, we bring it to birth in our mind. It is with this inner world that Socrates was wholly concerned, for Socrates saw that, for good or for ill, when we act as human beings, our action is governed by ideas, ideals, values, and aims formed in and by the mind.

This is the basis of Plato's notion of Forms. The Forms are simply the intelligible ideas. Things in themselves have no meaning and no reality for us. Things themselves do not give us knowledge. All knowledge, all understanding, comes from the mind. In things outside us there is no permanence; they have no character. (For further elucidation of this, see section V below.)

This is the gist of Plato's grossly misunderstood and much maligned

‘Theory of Forms’, and reluctantly I permit myself to digress here to address for the nth time this prevalent misunderstanding..

Tomes have been written debating Plato’s ‘Theory of Forms’. I adamantly insist that Plato had no such theory. The notion of the intelligible ideas is not a theory but a creative idea. (See *Plato’s Universe of Discourse*, 2015.) Plato tentatively tried various metaphors for relating the ‘forms’ to the perceptible objects: participation, inherence, communion, replication. Each of these metaphors, if affirmed positively and definitively, would be a ‘theory’; and it is these provisional theories that Plato makes Parmenides blast in the first part of the *Parmenides*.

An aspect of the supposed ‘Theory of Forms’ is said to be the assertion of the ‘separate existence’ of the Forms, a misunderstanding initiated by Aristotle.

The *chôrismos* affirmed by Socrates and Plato is the separation of the intelligible and the perceptible. Plato sings the praise of the ideal Forms in winged words and in the *Phaedrus* gives us the myth of the celestial abode of the Forms. But Socrates in the elenctic discourses finds all ‘forms’ merging together and in the end they are found to be one with *Sophia*, *nous*, *phronêsis*. Plato regularly speaks of the antitheses of the moral forms in the same vein as of the moral forms. In the first part of the *Parmenides* Socrates’ hesitation to admit forms of hair and dirt is blamed on his immature age. In the *Sophist* the ‘Friends of the Forms’ are taken to task for thinking “that change, life, soul, understanding have no place in that which is perfectly real — that it has neither life nor thought, but stands immutable in solemn aloofness, devoid of intelligence" (248e-249a, tr. Cornford.) How can all this be

compatible with a 'theory' that gives Forms a 'separate existence'? Above all, would not the 'separate existence' of the intelligible negate the distinction between the intelligible and the perceptible?

III

THE PHILOSOPHICAL LIFE

Early in the dialogue Socrates says that a true philosopher makes of his whole life an exercise in dying and being dead (64a). Not only is a philosopher least concerned with things of the body but she or he also find the body an impediment in the contemplation of the mind. Where does the soul (mind) come into contact with reality? When it tries to examine anything through the body it is led into error. It is in reasoning that it approaches what is real. It reasons best

when it gives up dependence on the body and reaches out for true being. The philosopher's soul (mind) therefore shuns the body and seeks to be in itself. Now, we say there is such a thing as justice, and beauty, and goodness. But we never perceived any such thing with our senses. It is when we examine these in thought that we come closest to knowing them. (65b-66a)

But when the soul (mind) reflects all by itself and in itself it moves into that which is pure and constant, and then it rests from wandering, being in communion with what is real and constant. (79d)

Such is the philosophical life. When Socrates said at his trial that daily to converse about virtue is the greatest good for a human being (38a), he was instituting the ideal of the philosophical life. This is the life of active, creative intelligence that is the proper *aretê*

(excellence, virtue) of a human being, that Plato variously calls *Sophia*, *nous*, *phronêsis* and identifies with *alêtheia* (reality) because it is there and only there that we are in communion with reality and ourselves attain reality.

IV

THE DIVINITY (ETERNITY) OF THE SOUL

What is commonly referred to as the ‘affinity argument’ (76d-84b) is of much more import and value than being one in a series of arguments for immortality. It is in a class by itself and is farther removed from having the semblance or pretense of being a logical argument. It is more openly poetical and emotional. In ascribing to the philosophical life and the intelligible realities with which it is concerned all

the characteristics of divinity it amounts to a proclamation of the divinity of the soul.

Socrates says: If beauty and goodness and all such realities have being, and if we discover these within ourselves, then our soul must have been prior to our birth. (76d-e) — Though Socrates here is ostensibly referring to temporal priority, yet beneath this we have the essential union of the reality of the intelligible ideas and the reality of the soul (mind), *kai ei mê tauta, oude tade* (76e). Socrates identifies the soul with the intelligible realm, or more particularly, with the principle of intelligence. At the core of this insight we find not the idea of temporal continuity but that of supra-temporal eternity. This is a creatively original metaphysical notion.

The philosophical soul is divine in being eternal in the only metaphysically

cogent sense of eternity — not as endless extension of time or infinity of time but as the principle of creative activity that transcends temporality in metaphysical reality. The philosophical soul lives not in the fleeting world of shadows but has its being on the plane of divine creative intelligence.

The full import of this comes out in the account ‘Diotima’ gives in the *Symposium* of the lover’s ascent to the vision of Beauty and is also given succinctly in a prophetic passage in the *Republic*:

“ ... a true philosophical nature aspires to reality (*to on*), does not tarry by the many particulars that are supposed to be, but goes forth with no blunting and no slackening of her desire, until she grasps the essence of all reality by that in her soul to which it is becoming to grasp that (that is, what is akin),

approaching and mingling with
what has true being, gives birth to
reason and reality; enjoys
knowledge and true life and is
nourished, and then has relief of
her birth pangs ...” (490a-b).

V

THE NATURE AND SCOPE OF PHILOSOPHICAL THINKING

After Socrates had presented the affinity argument, both Simmias and Cebes advanced objections. Simmias’s objection and Socrates’ answer are not particularly relevant to this paper. (See the section “Harmony” in Chapter Five of *Plato: An Interpretation*.) In answer to Cebes’s objection Socrates says: “The whole question of the cause of generation and corruption will have to be examined.” Then he adds, “I’m going

to relate to you my own experience about these” (95e-96a). When he does, it turns out that that experience led him to renounce all search for physical causes. He was convinced that no investigation of things outside the mind can answer any of the questions that concerned him as a philosopher. We will return to this crucial point further on but at the very outset we find something that calls for pause.

Socrates says, “When I was young I was tremendously keen on that kind of wisdom which they call investigation of nature (*tês sophias hên de kalousi periphuseôs historian*)” (96a). This is in flat contradiction to what we have in the *Apology* where Socrates emphatically denies ever engaging in or being interested in physical investigation (19c). What are we to make of this? My own conjecture is that Plato invents this early interest and the whole story of Anaxagoras’s book to dramatize

Socrates' firm renouncement of physical investigation. (That of course does not mean that Socrates did not read Anaxagoras's book.) Be that as it may. What is indubitable is that we have in the sequel the clear radical separation of physical (scientific, empirical) knowledge on the one hand and philosophical understanding on the other hand.

Socrates exemplifies this radical difference. He is seated in prison on his prison bed. Scientific investigation, giving an account of his position and posture, will give us detailed descriptions of his bones and joints and sinews and neurons. But all of that will not explain why he remains there when his friends were prepared to arrange for his escape. Only his notions of what is right and righteous can make us understand that. (98b-99a)

This is a distinction that both our scientists and our philosophers have chosen to ignore. No investigation into things outside the mind can answer an ultimate ‘What’ question or an ultimate ‘Why’ question. On the other hand, no investigation into pure ideas can give us any factual knowledge about how things are in the natural world. Among modern philosophers only Kant saw this clearly. This is the gist of the principle of philosophical ignorance. Socrates sums this by saying: *edoxe de moi chrênai eis tous logous kataphugonta en ekeinois skopein tôn ontôn tēn alêtheian* (99e). I give this crucial sentence in the original because it is highly liable to corruption in translation. He says he thought he should have recourse to ideas to search in them the — let me say, the reality of what is real, *tôn ontôn tēn alêtheian*, because it would be at best confusing to speak of ‘the truth of things’.

Earlier at 96c-d he explains why he renounced investigation into things. “I was so completely blinded by these studies ... I forgot what I had formerly believed I knew ... about the cause of man's growth. For I had thought previously that it was plain to everyone that man grows through eating and drinking; for when, from the food he eats, flesh is added to his flesh and bones to his bones, and in the same way the appropriate thing is added to each of his other parts, then the small bulk becomes greater and the small man large” (96c-d, tr. Fowler).

The explanation given of a human being's growth sounds naïve, but it is of the nature of all scientific explanation. No amount of sophistication will change that nature. Modern science will give us a detailed description of the development of a human child from a fertilized ovum, DNA and all, or may go beyond that to the first appearance of

a living organism. Similarly, science may give us a detailed account of the coming into being and passing away of a galaxy from Bang to Whimper. We deceive ourselves if we think that explains anything or makes us understand anything. (See “Stephen Hawking’s Bad Metaphysics”.) The credo of our modern religion is “Knowledge is power”. Yes, science gives us power to manipulate nature and probably eventually to wipe out the human race. But those who speak of science explaining things or giving us understanding simply do not have the notion of true understanding. Macbeth killed his king. The most comprehensive account of every neuron in Macbeth’s brain will not make us understand why he did it. Shakespeare bares Macbeth’s ambition and vainglory and we understand why.

Then comes a profoundly meaningful passage that our scholars

and professional philosophers have found it hard to appreciate:

“By Zeus, so far am I from thinking that I know the cause of such things, that I will not even admit that when somebody puts one beside one, that either the one to which the addition was made has become two, or that the one added and that to which it was added, by the placing of the one beside the other have become two, for I find it strange that when each of them was separate from the other, each was one and they were not then two, but when they approached each other, this was the cause for them to become two, the togetherness of being placed beside each other. Neither if somebody splits one, can I yet be convinced that this again – the splitting – has been the cause of the becoming of the two, this being the opposite of what was then the

cause of becoming two, for then it was the bringing them together and placing each beside each, now it is the taking away and separating each from each. ...” (96e-97b).

This is the core of the notion of the intelligible idea (*idea, eidos*). Let us imagine a man who has just had a terrible shock and as a result has suffered total amnesia. There are trees around him; to him they are just blots of colour, if they are even that. It is only when a tree is singled out and named a tree that it becomes a tree for him. Ideas are not found in things nor do they have any existence in the world outside us. Two sticks lying side by side are just a stick and a stick. It is only when a creative mind creates the idea of the series of numbers and the ideas of the members of the series that the stick and stick become two for us.

It is here (at 100c-d) that Socrates voices the insight “It is by Beauty that all that is beautiful is beautiful” — an insight that was to be re-affirmed by Plotinus in saying that only a soul made beautiful can appreciate beauty.

It is the ideas created by the mind and having no being other than in the mind that give meaning to all things. The simplest perception involves an idea. A mere sensation is not a perception. (This is the cornerstone of Kant’s transcendental system.) Hence Socrates further on says:

“You would loudly affirm that you do not know how else a thing becomes (what it is) than by participation in the proper reality of whatever it participates in,
metaschon tês idias ousias
hekastou hou an metaschêi, and that in such cases you do not have any other cause of the becoming of

'two' but participation in twoness,
and that it is necessary for that
which is to become two to
participate in this, and for that
which is to become one to
participate in oneness” (101b-c).

VI

THE HOAX

In quoting the passage at 96e-97b above
I cut out the last sentence because that
is quite another story. The passage
concludes:

“Nor do I yet admit to myself that I
know the cause of the becoming of
one, nor, in short, do I know of
anything else through what it
becomes or perishes or is,
according to this method of inquiry,
but I concoct for myself my own

method, for that other I will in no way approach” (97b).

This is amplified further on where we read:

“What I am saying is this, nothing new, but what I have always both earlier and in the present discussion never ceased to say. I will try to show you the kind of cause I fashioned for myself, going back to what I have so often been dinning and taking my start from that, laying down there is a beautiful in itself and a good and a large and all other such, which if you grant me and agree such things be, I hope from these causes to show and discover that the soul is deathless.”
(100b)

Here we have the very heart of the hoax. Plato here plays on the ambiguity in the terms *aitia* (cause) and *gignesthai* (become). In the authentic Socratic

sense, the idea is the ‘cause’ of a thing ‘becoming what it is for us’. The cause of a thing becoming what it is in itself is the physical cause that Socrates abstains from looking for. The ‘kind of cause’ Socrates concocted for himself is the principle of genuine philosophical thinking. This involves the renouncement of investigation into things, as giving no understanding, and confining philosophical inquiry to the investigation of ideas, which alone gives answers to genuinely philosophical questions. But Plato by what, if it were not irreverent, we might call a sleight of hand, turns it into a method “to show and discover that the soul is deathless”. We will see what this is worth when we come to consider ‘the final argument’ for immortality.

In the first place, how could Plato make Socrates argue with so much assurance for the survival of the soul, when in the *Apology* he had made him

distinctly express agnosticism on the question? (40c ff.) In *Socrates' Prison Journal* (2006), "Day Twenty-Nine", I reversed the positions of Cebes and Simmias on the one side and Socrates on the other side, making the two young men argue for survival and Socrates checking them.

At 97b Socrates says plainly that he can no longer say that he knows the cause of anything coming into being or perishing or continuing to be. Does this not amount to a repudiation of all the ostensible arguments in the *Phaedo*? It tells us plainly that all the speculation earlier in the dialogue about the cyclical character of genesis and about reminiscence and the like, all that was mere play. Plato certainly wanted his readers to examine and criticize such arguments. Plato often – to work his readers' minds or as part of the dramatic ploy – purposely planted the faults and

inconsistencies that scholars ‘discover’ in the dialogues.

The gist of the ‘autobiographical’ account is that, as a philosopher, Socrates is not concerned with the outside world. How can that be compatible with any serious consideration of life in another world external to us? Socrates’ conception of the nature of philosophical thinking makes any knowledge of the external world beyond the reach of pure reason. This was, strictly, Kant’s position. This was also the ground for Wittgenstein’s insistence that we can make no statement about the World — a position that Bertrand Russell failed to grasp because Russell as a confirmed Empiricist and Pluralist could not entertain the conception of the metaphysical Whole. (See Russell’s *My Philosophical Development*, 1959, p.86, quoted in “The Wittgenstein Enigma”, *The Sphinx and the Phoenix*, 2009.)

The *Phaedo* comprises four arguments for the immortality of the soul: the cyclical argument, the argument from reminiscence, the argument from affinity, and the fourth argument, commonly regarded as the principal argument. At no point does Plato claim or give the impression that any of the proofs is conclusive or sufficient. Throughout the dialogue we have broad hints that the arguments are not to be taken seriously. Simmias and Cebes persistently raise objections and ask for reassurance. The final word on the whole network of arguments in the *Phaedo* is given by Simmias in 107a-b: "I can't help still having in my own mind some disbelief about what has been said", to which Socrates responds approvingly and adds, "also our first hypotheses, even if you find them acceptable, nevertheless need to be examined more closely" (107b). This is in harmony with Plato's insistence in

the *Republic* that dialectic must always undermine the assumptions (hypotheses) of any philosophical statement. (533e)

After what I have been saying above it would be sheer mockery for me to examine the *Phaedo* arguments in detail. After all, our learned scholars have completely and repeatedly shredded to pieces not only these arguments but all of Plato's arguments and so-called doctrines and theories. I have already taken up the affinity argument separately as an integral aspect of Plato's hymn of praise for the philosophical life. For the cyclical argument and the argument from reminiscence the general remarks above and the general comments on argument and proof below suffice. Of the 'final argument' for the sake of which the special hoax in the concluding part of Socrates' 'autobiography' was purposely planted, let me say this:

When the method of argument from hypotheses comes to be applied it turns out to be little more than playing with words, and even if the conclusion – “the soul is dearhless” – is admitted, what ‘soul’ does the argument address? Only the soul as the principle of life. Thus the conclusion, if admitted, applies to the meanest bug in the same measure as to Socrates, but that signifies nothing about the survival of personality. It would be blasphemous to suppose that Plato could be blind to this. At no point could Plato be in earnest about the arguments or expect them to provide proof. The whole tissue of arguments, culminating in the ‘final argument’, is the substance of the hoax.

The crucial notion of the intelligible as opposed to the perceptible realm, the vision of the philosophical life and of the divinity of the soul, as of the conception of the nature and scope of philosophical thinking are all

advanced without argument (in the narrower sense of the term) and without proof. You can take it as a rule: where Plato argues most astutely and advances proofs and demonstrations, there he is least in earnest.

The whole series of arguments for immortality begins by defining death as the separation and release of body from soul and of soul from body (64c). This assumes the conception of a human being as made up of two separable (not simply distinguishable) elements (79b.) All four arguments for immortality in the *Phaedo* rest on this assumption and become untenable once it is questioned.

For Plato, at the metaphysical plane of thinking, *alêtheia*, *psuchê*, *nous*, *phronêsis* are not distinct but are one and the same thing. Despite all we hear about a soul separate or separable from the body, in the profoundest Socratic-Platonic insight the soul is simply the

principle of intelligence, creative intelligence. Critics will tell me I am creating my own Plato, a fictitious Plato: they would be right. Everyone of us has his own Plato. If my Plato looks very different from the Plato of erudition or from the Plato of Aristotle, so much the better. I do not pretend to be a historian or an exegete. The Plato I portray is the Plato that inspires my philosophy.

Platonism is not a philosophical system or a theory, but a vision, a vision that can not and need not be proved or demonstrated but is oracularly proclaimed, a prophecy announced in poetry and myth. The ground of the Platonic vision is that the intelligible is the real, or, as Parmenides had put it, intelligibility and reality are one and the same thing. The vision is not arrived at by reasoning but is itself the ground of philosophical reasoning.

Only dead abstractions call for
proof and are amenable to proof.
Genuine philosophy creatively brings to
birth visions clothed in myths that
breathe life into the shadows of the
phenomenal world.

May 4, 2017

UNHOAXING THE HOAX

1

Last week I posted to my blog a paper titled “Plato’s Greatest Hoax”. I have come to realize that I had badly botched it. My best philosopher friends completely missed what I had meant to convey. That was perhaps partly because I had digressed over such a wide range that the special object of the paper was eclipsed by the profusion of marginally related matter. But basically the misunderstanding is more deeply rooted; for understanding, at all levels, is never a passive reception but a creative interpretation. What I say has

its specific meaning in the complexity of my intellectual setup; in the reader's mind it receives new meaning in the context of the complexity of the reader's intellectual setup. This second, more deeply-seated 'allonoia' (if I may venture to coin a neologism) is irremediable. The simpler misunderstanding due to the writer's fault I thought I might partly remedy by offering the following revised and much reduced version. I will be indebted to whomever may care to look at this corrected version.

2

After the execution of Socrates, Plato left Athens and spent several years moving around. The duration of his voluntary exile is differently assessed by different scholars; but that it was years rather than months is undisputed. He must have been mulling what to do

with his life. He had been profoundly influenced by the character, life, thought, and ideals of Socrates and he felt it his duty and his mission to preserve all of that.

Plato knew that to the last Socrates maintained that he had no philosophical system capable of being taught and learned. When at his trial he declared that it was his mission to teach philosophy and virtue, he made it clear that he did that by questioning people, seeking to make them examine themselves and correct their evaluations and their priorities. Behind that was the conviction voiced by Socrates when he said that daily to converse about virtue is the best life for a human being.

That life-philosophy, the philosophy of the philosophical life, could not be encapsulated in a formula of words or of thought; neither was it capable of proof or logical

demonstration. Neither Callicles in the *Gorgias* nor Thrasymachus in *Republic* (Bk.I) could be convinced by Socrates of the superiority of the life of virtue and philosophy. Philosophical insight is not something to be conveyed in set words but is a fire kindled through the converse of minds.

3

Plato was a born poet and had attempted drama in his early youth. He now started writing dramatic pieces to keep alive the memory of Socrates and do homage to “the best, and wisest, and most righteous man”. No more than Aeschylus or Sophocles would Plato use drama to propagate positive doctrine. In his dramatic pieces the arguments themselves are among the *dramatis personae*; they have their role in the drama. The end of a Platonic dialogue is not a conclusion established

argumentatively but a total impression created artistically.

Naturally every piece would aim at specific effects and not one piece of Plato's works serves a single purpose solely. For instance, the two *Hippias* pieces make fun of the bombastic sophist. In the *Hippias Minor*, whose paradox puzzles erudite scholars, the paradox is the crux of the drama. It comes with a hidden proviso: intentionally (*hekôn*) doing what is bad – *if that were possible* – would be better than doing what is bad unintentionally (*akôn*). But that is not possible. Thus in the *Crito*, when Crito says that the *polloi* can inflict the greatest harm, Socrates says, “Would that the *polloi* could inflict the greatest harm, for they would then be capable of doing the greatest good” (44d). For Socrates-Plato virtue and wisdom are as inseparable as they are for Spinoza for whom only one with adequate ideas acts; with

inadequate ideas one is simply driven hither and thither.

The dramatic genius of Plato needs no showing. In the opening part of the *Crito* you can touch the quivering vocal chords of the good old man, choked with anxiety and grief. The *Protagoras* is a masterpiece of character portraiture, not only of Protagoras but of all the participants. The *Apology* and the *Crito* stand apart as perhaps the only dialogues that are to be taken at face value (which is not the same as taking them for factual accounts: dramatic truth is deeper than fact).

4

The *Phaedo* is clearly a multi-purpose dialogue. In the *Phaedo* Plato sings the praise of the philosophical life, offers a paean for the divinity of the soul, and in a passage queerly neglected by scholars (95e-102a), defines the nature and

scope of philosophical thinking. Along with all that we have a chain of arguments for the immortality of the soul in the sense of personal survival.

Throughout the dialogue Plato indicates unmistakably (through the words and moods of the *persona* of the drama) that none of the arguments for immortality is conclusive. That has no bearing on the factual question whether Socrates or Plato – either of them or both of them – personally believed or did not believe in personal survival. The point is simply that Plato knew that such a position cannot be established purely by reasoning. The whole tissue of argument had its place in the drama portraying the heroic martyrdom of Socrates. Plato could not have meant that the arguments, as such, be taken for proofs, any more than Shakespeare meant Hamlet's words – “in that sleep of death what dreams may come” – to be taken for a credo.

We go astray when we find in Plato's works doctrine or theory. Plato gives us insights to share and problems to ponder. In the drama of Lessing or Ibsen you don't seek edification but provocation. Let me be provocative. In over twenty-five centuries perhaps only three kin souls understood Plato: Plotinus, Giordano Bruno, and Shelley.

5

At the risk of once again defeating my own purpose by confusing the central issue of my paper, let me take up one of the points examined in the earlier paper.

At 97b Plato makes Socrates say:

“Nor do I yet admit to myself that I know the cause of the becoming of one, nor, in short, do I know of anything else through what it becomes or perishes or is, according to (the physical) method

of inquiry, but I concoct for myself my own method, for that other I will in no way approach” (97b).

Further on we read:

“ I will try to show you the kind of cause I fashioned for myself, going back to what I have so often been dinning and taking my start from that, laying down there is a beautiful in itself and a good and a large and all other such, which if you grant me and agree such things be, I hope from these causes to show and discover that the soul is deathless.” (100b)

Underneath these words lurks the ambiguity in the terms *aitia* (cause) and *gignesthai* (become). In the authentic Socratic sense, the idea is the ‘cause’ of a thing ‘becoming what it is for us’, i.e., acquiring its meaning for us. The cause of a thing becoming what it is in itself is the physical cause that Socrates shuns.

The ‘kind of cause’ Socrates concocted for himself is the principle of genuine philosophical thinking. This involves the renouncement of investigation into things”: such investigation into things gives us knowledge about how things appear to be but does not give us philosophical understanding. This latter only comes from the examination of pure ideas in the mind. (79c-d)

I cannot believe that the Plato who wrote that profoundly insightful ‘autobiographical’ passage (95e ff.) could have been unclear about this. Yet in what is called ‘the final argument’ he lets this dual ambiguity permit investigation into pure ideas to have objective jurisdiction. This runs counter to Socrates’ complete separation of investigation into things (*en ergois*) and investigation into ideas (*en logois*). This is reminiscent of Kant’s permitting Practical Reason to reach conclusions

that the Transcendental System places beyond the reach of Pure Reason.

What are we to make of this? I suggest this was an inner hoax within the wider hoax of passing the arguments for genuine arguments advanced in earnest. I further suggest that Plato wanted the reader to detect the hoax and that he gave direct and indirect clues to help in this. The direct clues are the repeated avowals of inconclusiveness, The indirect clues are the contradictions involved. This unhoaxes the hoax.

Tuchêi agathêi!

May 10, 2017

MY MODE OF PHILOSOPHY

My use of the word ‘philosophy’ (like my special use of the word ‘reality’) has been a cause of friction with my philosopher friends.

Over millennia the word philosophy has been used in a wide range of meanings. I have no quarrel with any of those usages. But when people assume that, because I call myself a philosopher, I have to do the kinds of philosophy others are doing, I protest since I have the right to limit myself to my kind of philosophy provided I state clearly what I mean by

that. But first we have to clear some hurdles.

When people speak of research in the rapidly developing area of Information Technology or the so-called Artificial Intelligence as philosophy, I have a reservation. Why? Such research develops techniques, ways of doing things and achieving certain results. But that research and those techniques cannot in themselves judge whether all of that is good or bad. We dogmatically assume that all 'progress' is good, but that assumption is just that: an assumption. It is the business of philosophy in the traditional sense to consider the questions of right and wrong, good and bad. Call your research philosophy if that pleases you, but that does not make your research qualified to deal with the traditional philosophical questions about right and wrong, good and bad. That lies outside

your jurisdiction and beyond your capacity.

When people call the examination of ways and means for managing human society philosophy, once again I have a reservation. The use of the word philosophy here suggests that the examination of the practical problems of human organization and management should or can proceed purely by means of pure reasoning. Social and political problems are about the means to certain ends. The problems of means can only be resolved empirically by trial and error, constant adjustment and re-adjustment involving multiple compromises. But the ends to be aimed at cannot be determined by such means; they also cannot be determined by pure reason in the strict sense of inferential logical deduction.

Humanity, now more than ever, is badly in need of sane, enlightened

thinking — in need of understanding the true worth of the human person and appreciating the values that give meaning and value to human life. These have been known to enlightened spirits from the earliest times. But the overwhelming majority of humans are enthralled by false values. In our present-day world, half the world population is enslaved by consumerism and competitiveness and the other half by superstition. The true values need no re-discovery; they need to be disseminated, vitalized, and impressed on the multitudes drowned in materialism and in superstition. There is no way for doing this overnight. It can only be done slowly by artists, poets, and philosophers in one of the many senses of the word philosophy. Whether this task can be achieved before the greed and stupidity of world political leaders lead to the total and final

destruction of the human race — that is an open question.

What about my kind of philosophy? I have been engaged in the humble, limited, stringently confined task of re-affirming and spreading those old values. I have been stressing that our true worth and value is in our inner reality which Socrates referred to as that in us which is benefited by doing what is right and is harmed by doing what is wrong.

To place all the emphasis on this I have insisted on relieving philosophy of two burdens that, in my view, have hindered philosophy from doing its proper work: (1) the burden of seeking or claiming to yield factual knowledge about things outside the human mind; and (2) the burden of reaching or producing demonstrable truth. Philosophy neither should nor can nor has ever been able to do either of these.

My kind of philosophy probes the ideas, ideals, and values within our minds and gives them expression in parable, metaphor, and myth.

For all the other activities bearing the name philosophy I have neither capacity nor desire.

Perhaps it is not out of place to say here that I do not write learned dissertations but philosophical essays. A philosophical essay is a free excursion of reflective thought.

May 13, 2017

N.B: I first titled this paper “My Kind of Philosophy”. When I came to save the document Windows discovered I had another paper under that title. That was written on August 25, 2016. The reader may look it up.

THE APPLE

a whimsical tale

In the Garden of Eden Adam and Eve lived happily.

Until Eve came holding in her palm a roundish object that looked appealing and appetizing.

She stretched out her hand to Adam.

He looked questioningly.

“Apple”, she said.

“Apple?”, he repeated.

There was another question in his eyes.

“Apple tree”, she answered his questioning glance.

“Tree?”, he repeated.

The chief god overheard them.

“O hell!”, he exclaimed. “They have invented language. Next they will invent thought and become like one of us. I will drive them out of Eden; let them eat their bread with the sweat of their brow. That will keep them from thinking and becoming equal to us.”

Ever since humans have been torn between the demands of bread and the demands of thought.

May 14. 2017

WHEN ARE WE FREE?

A different approach
to the Free Will problem

Scores of learned books and papers have been written on the so-called ‘free will problem’. Thus the erudite create problems where there are none, keeping themselves busy with intractable logical puzzles. The whole mess is a bundle of confusions and sophisticated nonsense. Outside academic circles no one ever suspects the existence of such a problem.

The pseudo-problem of free will arose from the fiction of determinism – the earlier theological determinism and

the modern physical or causal determinism – and is compounded by the confusion of free will with freedom of choice. The term ‘free will’ in itself is a pitfall for there is no such thing as a Will that wills; there is only willing, as Thomas Hobbes rightly saw (*Leviathan*, Part I., chap.VI). (I append a note on the so-called logical determinism.)

Let us leave theological determinism to theologians to crack their heads on since it clearly arises from the fiction of an omnipotent and omniscient God. Next let me dispose of causal determinism in a few words. Causal determinism is a scientific theory. Scientific theories are either (1) descriptions of observed phenomenal regularities, or (2) interpretations of phenomenal happenings. In either category the theory must be of a high level of generality and is necessarily transitory, subject to revision at any time. The so-called Laws of Nature can

never be of perfect accuracy or absolute certainty. There is always room for novelty and for surprises. But even if the theory of causal determinism were flawless, the problem would be how to reconcile that with our unquestionable experience of free activity, not the other way round. Scientists would have to correct their account to allow for freedom of action rather than philosophers having to find excuses for defying the so-called Laws of Nature.

The confusion of free will with freedom of choice is responsible for most of the quandaries involved in the putative problem. Choice is a consequence of our imperfection. We have to exercise choice because we are imperfect being in an imperfect world. Choice is always determined by antecedents but those antecedents include our beliefs, principles, values, and ideals, and even our tastes and whims. Thus while choice is always

necessarily determined it is in full agreement with our autonomy. For good or for ill, my choice is the choice of the person I am. The dubieties and nuances of the experience of choice are grit for the psychological mill, not for the philosopher.

When we act spontaneously without premeditation, even in simple banal acts, we are free. When I take up my cup of coffee it is not because neurons in my brain dictate a certain motion but because I want ('will') a sip of coffee. When I turn a corner and see my granddaughter coming from the opposite direction and I open my arms and embrace her I act freely: whatever the accompaniments of cells, glands, and neurons in my body may be, that is not the cause of my action; the cause is my love of her.

The problem of human freedom is a moral problem not a logical puzzle.

When we are clear in our mind about our values, priorities, and principles, as Socrates would say, or when we have adequate ideas, as Spinoza has it, then we are free moral agents. This is the gist of the grossly misunderstood and much maligned ‘intellectualism’ of Socrates. In the spontaneity of moral acts and of intelligent creativity (in poetry, art, philosophy) we are at the highest level of human freedom.

There is nothing problematic in all of this. There is of course the moral problem: Why are we most of the time enthralled by fake values, false aims, foolish desires? Why are even the best of us only by fits and starts rational human beings? This is the problem true philosophers wrestle with. Socrates was all his life trying to help people clear the confusions, obscurities, entanglements, and falsehoods in their minds, to help them be free and live and act as rational human beings who know

that all their value and worth is in having a healthy soul. It is ignorance, as Socrates well knew, that denies us freedom, not causal determinism.

June 17, 20`7

APPENDIX: Professor Kevin Timpe delineates logical determinism thus:

“Logical determinism builds off the law of excluded middle and holds that propositions about what agents will do in the future already have a truth value. For instance, the proposition ‘Allison will take the dog for a walk next Thursday’ is already true or false. Assume that it is true. Since token propositions cannot change in truth value over time, it was true a million years ago that Allison would walk her dog next Thursday.” (Kevin Timpe,

“Free Will”, Internet Encyclopedia
of Philosophy)

This is so blatantly absurd that only
learned scholars can take it seriously.
To have a truth value a proposition has
to relate to an actually extant state of
affairs. Propositions about the future do
not relate to an objective state of affairs.
Aristotle rightly said that propositions
about the future are neither true nor
false. I will not waste more time
discussing such nonsense.

THE WORLD SOUL

on the soul and on the limits of
philosophical discourse

In the *Phaedrus* Plato presents a nice ‘proof’ of the eternity of the soul (245c-246a). It is rewarding to consider this proof from more than one standpoint. I quote this crucial passage in full, in Harold North Fowler’s translation in the Loeb Classical Library edition:

“Every soul is immortal. For that which is ever moving is immortal; but that which moves something else or is moved by something else, when it ceases to move, ceases to live. Only that which moves itself,

since it does not leave itself, never ceases to move, and this is also the source and beginning of motion for all other things which have motion. But the beginning is ungenerated. For everything that is generated must be generated from a beginning, but the beginning is not generated from anything ; for if the beginning were generated from anything, it would not be generated from a beginning. And since it is ungenerated, it must be also indestructible; for if the beginning were destroyed, it could never be generated from anything nor anything else from it, since all things must be generated from a beginning. Thus that which moves itself must be the beginning of motion. And this can be neither destroyed nor generated, otherwise all the heavens and all generation must fall in ruin and stop and never

again have any source of motion or origin. But since that which is moved by itself has been seen to be immortal, one who says that this self-motion is the essence and the very idea of the soul, will not be disgraced. For every body which derives motion from without is soulless, but that which has its motion within itself has a soul, since that is the nature of the soul; but if this is true, that that which moves itself is nothing else than the soul, then the soul would necessarily be ungenerated and immortal” (245c-246a, tr. Fowler).

I have said somewhere that when Plato argues most astutely you can be sure he is least in earnest. Here we have a prime instance. But it is not my intention to examine the argument as such.

First a preliminary remark: Plato says that every soul is immortal, *athanatos*, but the whole passage makes better sense if we take the term *athanatos* to signify eternity rather than personal survival.

Next let us note that this whole passage cannot apply to the individual soul, since no living being – and indeed no particular finite being – is strictly self-contained, self-sufficient, complete in itself. The human soul is only relatively autonomous. Its activity is always conditioned – not determined but conditioned – by what is outside of it. Even human creativity – moral and artistic – is grounded in the particular individual personality. When we speak of the spontaneity of moral or creative acts we mean no more than that the act is not determined by what is external to the individual personality. Thus when Plato says that “self-motion is the essence and the very idea of the soul”

that can only apply to the World Soul. This harmonizes with the representation of the world in the *Timaeus* as a single living organism.

Indeed we have in this passage the gist of Aristotle's doctrine of the First Mover. Aristotle however corrupts the idea when he sees the First Mover as independent of the World, separate from the World, moving the World from outside the World. The First Mover thus becomes a particular entity that calls for an explanation, for a cause of its being external to it.

Plato says that "that which moves itself is nothing else than the soul". In this sense the soul is what is ultimately real and what is ultimately real is nothing else than activity. Plato does not say this in explicit terms but it harmonizes with his seeing all that is real in any sense as nothing other than *dunamis*, activity (*Sophist*, 247e).

Hence in my philosophy I say that what is ultimately real is not to be conceived as a being but as activity, not as a creator but as creativity, not as a creative intelligence but as intelligent creativity, which I name Creative Eternity.

I said we have to consider the passage from more than one standpoint. I will now take it up from a different angle: What does the ‘proof’ actually prove? What does Plato’s nice proof prove? If we are speaking about establishing the existence of an objective state of affairs, then neither Plato’s argument here or elsewhere nor any properly philosophical discourse does or can establish anything relating to the actual world outside the human mind. In the above-quoted passage Plato is simply unfolding what for him soul means, and in doing so he enriches our cultural heritage with a creative notion which opens up for us a new

field of intelligibility. (See my *Plato's Universe of Discourse*.)

The whole of philosophy proper is an exploration of ideas. The mind works with ideas, in ideas, through ideas, to widen our scope of intelligibility. The world for us is dumb, there is no meaning in the world. The mind casts patterns of intelligible ideas on the world, and lo! the world is meaningful! All meaning we find in the world has been put in the world by the human mind: so says Socrates; so says Kant.

Towards the end of the *Phaedrus* Plato hurls his famous dictum saying that “he who thinks that he has left behind him any art in writing, and he who receives it in the belief that anything in writing will be clear and certain, would be an utterly simple person ...” (245c-d. tr. Fowler). And as if Plato feared this may not be taken seriously enough, he goes on reiterating

and emphasizing it in the strongest terms over the following two pages,

But Plato in fact wrongs himself by understating his case in confining the interdiction to written discourse. The ailment is not in the written words but in the language embodying the thought and in the thought that necessarily has to be conveyed in determinate formulations of speech. No definite philosophical statement is ever “clear and certain” for all purposes and in all contexts.

When Plato speaks of the living discourse imprinted in the soul, he is referring to genuine philosophical discourse that does not end in or lead to a dogmatic formulation but enlightens and enriches the soul in the course of the discussion. A philosophical statement is only meaningful (‘true’) within the context of a particular universe of discourse. The philosophical

venture is a journey whose reward is not the end sought or attained but the journey itself.

To be consistent with Plato's whole position, what he says in the *Phaedrus* must be taken in conjunction with what he says in the *Republic* where the Form of the Good as the ultimate Reality can only be spoken of in metaphor and simile and where we are enjoined to destroy the hypotheses underlying our philosophical stance; and also in conjunction with the *Parmenides* Where the Eleatic sage gives us a practical demonstration of the dialectic undermining of hypotheses as applied to his own theses. He explicitly says that this is what he proposes to do. Yet our scholars find the dialogue puzzling.

In the *Phaedrus* itself what do we have? Apart from the concluding remarks about writing, we have nothing but poetic flights of imagination and

playful mythologizing, but such playful mythologizing that gives us wings to soar with into the realm of celestial Realities. And where is that realm located? Nowhere but in our mind. The beginning and end of philosophizing is an exploration of our mind, our inner reality.

June 30, 2017

SOUL SEMANTICS

I am unhappy with the current usage of the terms Dualism and Monism. The term 'dualism' derives from Descartes's division of all things into two separate substances, an extended substance (matter) and a thinking substance (mind, soul). Materialists who hold that the extended substance is all there is were referred to as Monists, implying that there is no such thing as mind. Advocates of the reality of the mind fell into the trap and called themselves Dualists. This was unwise. The moment you take mind for a separate substance you have opened the gates to the materialist hordes. They can easily

show that mind does not satisfy any of the criteria of objective existence. *Ergo* there is no mind.

A defensible Idealism must maintain that there is no mind without objective content and there is no matter without subjective support. In our daily life and equally in our scientific studies we deal with objects of which we can only observe the outer husk. This suits science perfectly. But all the objects in the world outside us that we deal with in our practical life and in our scientific studies have no meaning in themselves. They only obtain meaning from the patterns in which the mind clothes them. (Plato's forms, Kant's concepts of the Understanding). This, as I said, suits science perfectly. Science owes its astounding achievements to this limitation, namely, that it has to do with the outside of things. Yet a philosopher wonders: these objects that only have borrowed meaning thanks to the mind,

how can they have being at all.
Philosophers advance various scenarios
to solve the puzzle: Spinoza's one
substance where *natura naturata* is
inseparable of *natura naturans*;
Leibniz' monads; Berkeley making all
things percepts in the mind of God;
Schopenhauer making all things
representations of the universal Will —
these are examples of the philosophers'
'justification' of the bare existence of
things.

In all my writings I abstain from
using the term 'dualism'. I hold that
only what is whole is real; to understand
anything we have to see it as a whole.
Pace Plato, I am not a body and a soul:
I am one integral person. Since I am a
particular, determinate being, I am not a
perfect whole; my being depends on
things outside my person. On the
physical plane I am a physical object
subject to the laws of physics. On the
biological plane I am an animal sharing

the characteristics of a rat or a sheep. On the intellectual plane I am a thinking, problem-solving creature, characteristics which I share with a chimpanzee or a squirrel. But then I have being on the spiritual (metaphysical) plane: on this plane I am a moral, creative person, characteristics which, to my knowledge, I share only with other human beings. I do not say that on this plane I have a soul (mind); rather, on this plane I am my soul, I am my mind.

Thus to the question: Do you have a soul (mind)? I answer: No, I do not have a soul because a soul is not a thing to be had in the sense of possessed.

Let us take an example that is easier to comprehend. I can see; I have the power of sight. If you ask me: Do you have sight? I will answer, No, for sight is not a thing that can be possessed and entered into the log of my

possessions; but I am a seeing creature,
I exercise the power of sight.

Similarly, if you ask me: Do you have a soul (mind)? I answer: No, since a soul is not the kind of thing to be possessed, but I have being on the metaphysical plane. On the metaphysical plane I love, I rejoice, I enjoy beauty, I create philosophical views. When the materialist (empiricist, positivist, physicalist) says to me: “You don’t have a soul”, I reply: “My good sir, what you say is perhaps truer than you know, but what you mean by what you are saying is grossly erroneous. I do not have a soul: I am my soul; my soul is my inner reality and the whole of my worth. My soul is I on the metaphysical plane.”

July 17, 2017

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